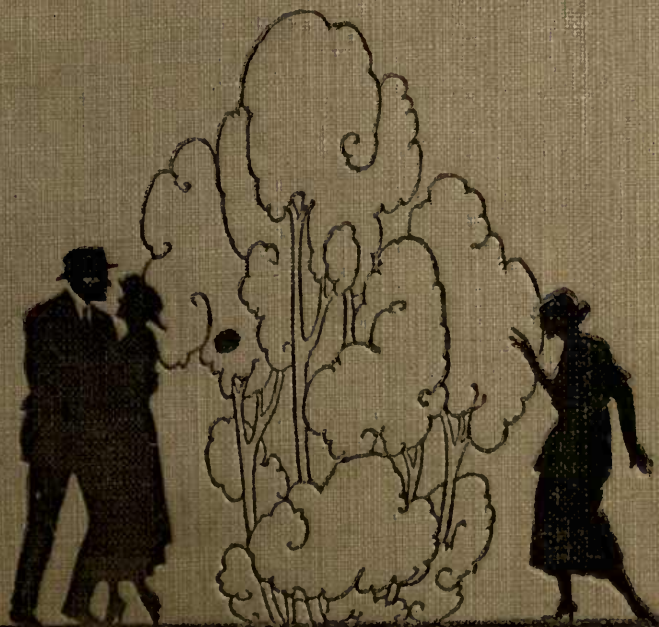


# SHIFTING SANDS

By  
Mrs. Patrick MacGill



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**M**RS. PATRICK MACGILL is always on the side of the angels—with Cupid in attendance.

One day a young motorist sees a pretty girl conducting a singing-class in a Devonshire meadow. He immediately falls in love, and being young, handsome, and of good birth, he can afford it.

His "people" are horrified at the thought of the son and heir wanting to marry a village school-teacher, even one who sings in a Devonshire meadow—the angels and Cupid become grave.

When, however, his valet enters the lists as a rival, Dame Drama joins the angels and Cupid, and the pace of the story becomes breathless. One exciting incident follows another, until Daisy is left with the right man and the angels sigh their relief, Cupid gets out his grindstone and Dame Drama goes into a home of rest.





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BY  
MRS. PATRICK MACGILL



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## SHIFTING SANDS

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# SHIFTING SANDS

## CHAPTER I

“**W**ILT thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?”  
“ I will.”

The answer came in firm clear tones from the bright-eyed, earnest boy—in spite of his twenty-three years, the bridegroom did not look as if he had reached man’s estate—and a little sound like a sigh passed over the dim-lighted, flower-scented church.

The tall, dark-eyed bride, who was a little taller than the man at her side, made her responses in a voice that, somehow, sounded artificial and slightly stagey; certainly, her tones lacked the quality of intense earnestness that distinguished those of the man she was marrying.

All the earnestness that lay in the nature of Julia Slade, now Julia Milburn, had gone into the almost superhuman efforts that she had made in front of the glass that morning to be the best dressed bride

that had stood before the altar in St. George's, Hanover Square, that season.

The natural roses on the smooth olive cheeks had been deepened by rouge, and the long, large, dark eyes had been rendered starry bright by means of belladonna, while the rich waves of hair, black as night, had been dressed for the great day by the most famous hairdresser in London.

"Isn't she lovely? What a perfectly glorious fit her frock is, and her train is sewn with real pearls, and cost a little fortune! Jack Milburn paid for the dress, I heard, but of course, I couldn't say for certain, so don't repeat it, dear, will you?"

"Certainly not, darling. As you say, she's lovely, but she looks a lot older than he, don't you think?"

Questions and answers such as these were being discreetly whispered behind hymn sheets under cover of the choir's exquisite singing.

There was a subdued murmur as the newly-made wife appeared on the arm of her young husband, moving slowly, in careful time to the music, down the long aisle towards the door, through which the blue June day peeped shyly.

Love is the divine reason for our existence, the mainspring of our best endeavour, and the measure of supreme reward.

All these emotions and profound beliefs were chasing each other across Jack Milburn's face as he escorted his "flower of the world" as he proudly called her, to the waiting car, and it was seeing



Julia's cold unemotional face beside his that gave away two cardinal facts concerning her, one being that she was certainly not in love, and, the other, that, for all her undoubted beauty, she was at least six years older than the man whom she had married.

The guests hurried out of the church as soon as the bridal pair had left, the majority to go on to the reception which was being held at the Ritz Hotel.

But there was one man—or rather, two, although the second was not an invited guest—who did not go on to the lavish reception which Julia had insisted on being given, though it had crippled her widowed mother's resources for the rest of the year.

Gerald Graham squared his somewhat slim shoulders as he passed down the steps of the church and into his waiting car. He was followed by the biggest contrast to himself that could possibly be imagined.

Martin Eversley seemed to take up the whole car, which was a big, roomy Rolls-Royce, with his huge muscular frame. It was as though a bull had somehow got into a child's playhouse. His long, eager, brown face, sensitive mouth and nostrils, aggressive chin, and deeply-set grey eyes, all made up a countenance that compelled attention, and indeed, there were very few people, men or women, who did not look twice at Martin Eversley.

He had been Gerald Graham's paid companion ever since he had saved his life at the risk of his own when he got him out of the clutches of a crew of drunken Lascars in a Chicago slum.

His employer fixed his eyes sadly on the moving panorama of Regent Street as the car bore him swiftly and silently to his chambers in Pall Mall, and then, with a stifled sigh, he turned to his huge, virile, sunburnt companion, and asked a somewhat curious question.

"Have you ever been in love, Martin?" he asked.

There was a quiet expression, not exactly of contempt, but almost of pity, in the big man's eyes, as he answered, slowly, in a deep, booming voice which exactly matched his personality, "Can't say I have, Mr. Graham. Women always scare me, somehow; and I've never had much time for 'em," he added, indifferently.

"Ah!" There was a sigh from the slender, good-looking owner of the elegant car.

"Don't give away that big, husky heart of yours unless you can help it, Martin. Love's the very deuce," said the young man of many possessions, who had just subjected himself to the exquisite torture of seeing the woman to whom he had once been engaged married to another man.

His romance had come to an end six months ago, just seven weeks before he had come into the entire fortune of a wealthy relative who had been dying for years.

He could have afforded Julia now, even with her expensive tastes, but as soon as his ring was off her finger, it was replaced by another, of infinitely greater value, one which had been bought by the

only son of a merchant prince, the youth who was now receiving the somewhat tempered congratulations of his friends.

Gerald Graham bit his lip and tried to console himself with the reflection that after all it was for the best ; that the love of a woman who could coolly throw over her affianced lover directly a better chance came along, was hardly worth having. But it was hard ; the lovely, dark face and perfect figure went to his head like rare wine. He envied Jack Milburn.

Martin Eversley continued to look across at his employer with his kind, worldly-wise eyes. He was twenty-nine, just six months younger than Gerald Graham, but he felt, and in reality was, twenty years older than the man who paid him to be his companion.

"Why, he's a baby, a kid playing with life as if it was a toy balloon. With all his money, he ought to be *doing* things, not messing round chasing petticoats that don't want him by the look of it. Wonder how he'd do out in the Yukon, or on a tramp ship with a lot of Chinks, and Malays, and Niggers for a crew, wonder how he'd—".

His wonderings were cut short by Gerald Graham's cultured, somewhat drawling voice, "I think we'll clear out of London for a spell, Martin. I'm choked, and sick, and sorry into the bargain. Look up the trains, and pack a few things, and we'll be off to Lynton, a little Devon village that's right out of the beaten track, and as sleepy as a

tortoise. You'd like a breath of the sea, wouldn't you?" he finished, letting his eyes rest affectionately for a moment on the man to whom he owed his life.

"Ay," said Martin slowly and emphatically.

He meant it, for the artificial gilded life of the world's greatest city had no niche into which he could permanently fit.

Looking at him, one thought immediately of illimitable seas, wind-swept plains, vast, silent forests, and all the great primeval forces which lie at the heart, and not on the surface of life.

Yet Martin was London born, and had run about the streets of Limehouse, a little ragged, half-starved creature, until he reached the age of seven, when he was taken off to Canada by his father, in an old tramp steamer.

He had lived intensely, romantically, sometimes brutally, but always with the full force of his being, in many countries, under all sorts of conditions.

He had taken a fancy to see England, and particularly London, once more, and that was why he had accepted Gerald Graham's offer to accompany him home as his companion.

He had intended to throw up the job as soon as he had "knocked about the village a bit," as he termed it, and work his way back to America, where he had a number of companions, who, if not exactly friends, were men of his own kind, hard, husky fellows, who lived life as he lived it, and looked at it from his own essentially masculine angle.



But six months had gone by, and still Martin lingered. It was not that the surface glitter and excitement of London chained him—none knew better what lay beneath than this man who had been born and bred in its slums—but association with Gerald Graham, and the kindly interest that was taken in him by those who belonged to his employer, had opened his eyes to the fact that there was a very great deal more in life than hard manual toil and wandering about the world.

Visiting a great country house in the sweet orchards of Kent, a sudden passionate desire to wring something more than a bare subsistence out of life had come to him.

He loved the earth, and it is but natural to want to possess that which is beloved.

“ This guy of a man, who’s never seen and known life, or met men with red blood in them—he’s got all this, and he’s never done anything to help either himself or his fellows. Just fooled and idled about all his life, from birth upwards. Well, if I’m not of what he calls his “ class,” I’d love and appreciate things just as much. I’ll get all I want, sometime, but first of all I’ve got to win through.”

That was Martin Eversley all over—terrifically forceful, almost primitively simple, and, like most people of this type, a man of one idea, who never rested until his set purpose was accomplished.

It was his employer who gave him the key to the problem that he was trying to solve, and incidentally, the key eventually proved itself to be of pure gold.

"If only you could write as well as you talk, Martin, there'd be a fortune for you. I've never read any stories that thrill and interest me like those that you tell," said Gerald Graham, lazily, one night, between puffs of cigar smoke.

The pair were sitting in his chambers after dinner. Martin had been talking of the old life that he had known, the world of many-hued lands and people, of sea and ships.

"How could I learn to write as well as I talk?" was Martin's characteristically direct reply.

His employer laughed.

"What a fellow you are, Martin! You never use two words if one will do. But don't embark on what I have heard is the most precarious career in existence solely on the strength of my unasked opinion. Er—you couldn't put your physique on paper, for example, and writers have to be very highly-educated men, as a rule, before they can make a living out of their work," finished Gerald Graham, in a deprecating tone.

He liked his companion, and certainly did not want to turn him into a burner of the midnight oil.

But he did not know Martin, not even on the surface; he altered his opinion, and he gave an inward gasp of surprise at the virility, earnestness, and indomitable resolve of the man.

A sudden flame seemed to dart through Martin Eversley; he bent forward, his eyes narrowed, his voice trembling, his whole body taut with feeling. He struck his great fist on his knee.

"I don't care about the rule, or the fine education that's necessary," he almost shouted. "I'm going to write about real men and real life, not as people who've never been out of England, except on a Cook's tour, see it, but as it is, and as it's lived. You gents have made a corner in all the fine, beautiful things of life, and think it's because you are different from us common people that you are able to enjoy 'em. But it isn't! It's because you don't understand people, through being wrapped up in cotton-wool all your days. But I'll tell you things that'll show you what it means to be alive."

Martin broke off, his eyes glowing, his sensitive mouth quivering.

"Have I said too much?" he enquired, with a boyish diffidence, which greatly touched the gently nurtured aristocrat, and made him resolve that this rough diamond should not be lost to the literary world for lack of a little polish.

"No, Martin, you havn't said too much; you have opened my eyes to the possibilities that may lie within you. If you like, in the considerable amount of spare time that your duties allow you, I will give you the run of all my books, and engage a sympathetic teacher to guide your studies and help you to clothe your ideas in intelligible language. No publisher will look at stuff that is mainly written in slang," he said, seriously.

Martin's regard for his employer passed from liking to love, and in three months he had made as much progress as the average intelligent student

of one subject makes in two years. His brain soaked up knowledge as a sponge absorbs water.

"He is marvellous, in fact, I can safely say that the word "genius" may be applied to him," were the admiring words of the professor whom Gerald Graham had engaged for his protegee.

And this was the character of the man with whom Gerald Graham had later to cross swords in that keenest of all contests—Love.



## CHAPTER II

**W**HERE are you going to, my pretty maid?  
Where are you going, my honey?"  
"Over the hills, kind sir," she said,  
"To my father a-mowing the barley."

There is something infinitely sweet in any song sung in the stillness of a country lane or meadow, no matter how poor the actual performance; but when a soft summer breeze blows little children's voices to the listener's ear, something of poignant pathos mingles with the sweetness, and brings an unaccountable lump into the throat.

The sight of twenty little boys and girls, all ranged stiffly in rows, in the middle of a Devonshire field, singing the old-fashioned song which had charmed Gerald Graham from afar, gave him a feeling of having brushed against something sweet, and clean, and unutterably pure.

He and Martin had only just arrived at the sleepy village.

"Go on to the hotel and book two rooms. I'd like to walk," he said, tempted by the sight of the hedges all aglow with wild roses and smelling exquisitely of honeysuckle.

He peeped through the tangle of hedgerow flowers that concealed him from the view of the children,

and his eyes rested appreciatively on the rosy cheeks of the little girls, and the fair heads of the sturdy boys.

But suddenly he caught his breath with a little gasp, and a whispered "By jove!" escaped his lips.

A young girl had walked from beneath the shadow of a tree to a spot in front of the assembled class of children.

The sweet grace of childhood seemed still to cling to the young limbs, and softly rounded cheeks, while the charmingly unabashed expression of frank maidenhood lay in the depths of the blue, unawakened eyes fringed with the dark lashes and arched with dark brows that were in such curious contrast to the silky waves of corn-gold hair that were swept back from the white forehead with such severe simplicity.

As he looked, his always susceptible heart on fire with his wonderful discovery, Gerald Graham likened her to a white and gold flower, a daisy on a slender stem, growing in a field of wind-swept corn.

Unconsciously, in his apt simile, he had stumbled across Daisy Harland's name.

"Marguerite" was the one word which had been written on a sheet of paper in a woman's hand, and pinned to the fleecy shawl which had enveloped the loveliest baby that the village of Lynton had ever seen. Nobody knew who was the little waif, nor from whence she had come.

"Send her to the Union? No, I couldn't do that. I'll keep her," said the little village school-

mistress, whose hair was already getting thin and grey at the temples.

The tiny waif was christened "Marguerite Harland," but was soon called Daisy, possibly from her likeness to the pretty field flower.

Everybody in Lynton knew her story, and Martha Harland did not make the foolish mistake of letting the child think she was a relation, although she called her "Auntie."

It was quite natural that Daisy should become a teacher, and now, at eighteen years of age, earning thirty-five shillings a week, as the second mistress of the Infants' School, she was as healthy, happy, and as beautiful a girl as could be found in any corner of Great Britain.

"If only I were a painter, I'd perpetuate that face," murmured the man behind the hedge, who had seen all the world's most beautiful pictures in his time.

"That will do for this afternoon, children. You may go now," said Daisy, in her clear, girlish voice, when a distant clock chimed four.

Gerald Graham's beauty-loving eyes drank in one of the sweetest, most moving little scenes that they had ever beheld.

As the children trooped in single file before the young girl, some of them halted, and produced bunches of wild flowers, mostly with hot, sticky stalks, from having been fiercely clutched in little hands behind baby backs all through the singing lesson, which they offered for their beloved teacher's acceptance.

Something smarted the eyes of the watching man as he saw that pure young face downbent over some baby countenance, kissing lips as pure as mountain dew in thanks for the gift.

Daisy waited until the last chubby-legged child had departed, then she gathered together her posies of clover and buttercups, daisies and even dandelions, smiling at the innocence of the gatherer of the last-named weed, whose favourite colour was yellow.

Her sun-flushed face was very charming beneath the brim of the big hat of coarse brown straw that she wore, and the bunch of buttercups which she tucked carelessly into the belt of her holland frock gave just the touch of colour that was needed to complete a study which, to Gerald Graham's mind, would have made the fortune of any painter.

Daisy was quite unconscious of the picture that she made as she stood for a moment at the gate of the field, looking dreamily down the sweet country lane which led to the cottage where she lived.

Gerald Graham felt small and suddenly very diffident, but he was powerless to resist the impulse to speak to this beautiful, country girl.

He raised his hat, and infused just the amount of respectful homage into his voice to make any other girl than Daisy blush with pleasure.

"Excuse me, but can you direct me to the Cobbler's Arms? I have sent my man on to book rooms, but have lost my own way."

The deep blue eyes met those of the man quite



coolly and levelly. Lynton was no longer "off the beaten track" for tourists; strangers were quite common in the village now.

"Your way lies the same as mine. If you like, I will show you the hotel, but I am afraid, unless your rooms are already booked, that they will not be able to accommodate you. They"—a dimple suddenly appeared in each creamy cheek, and a smile chased them in again. "They were sleeping in the bathroom last night," she finished, as if the fact were a joke.

Gerald Graham pretended to be alarmed. As a matter of fact, he only wanted an excuse to continue the conversation with his charming little companion.

"You don't say so!" he ejaculated, seemingly much concerned.

They talked of abstract matters, the crops, the weather, the peculiar ways of school-children, and a dozen other things, as they walked along, but all the while Gerald Graham was busy wondering how he could possibly effect another meeting.

"There is the Cobbler's Arms—you can see the sign from here. I live in this little cottage, and auntie will be waiting tea for me," said Daisy, simply, as she bent her golden head in farewell and hurried through a little green gate, up a long, flower-bordered path, which led to the tiny cottage that held Daisy's little world—at least, that portion of it which was dearest to her.

Gerald Graham could see the little old lady who was waiting at the door for Daisy, and for the

second time that afternoon, he experienced a feeling of having come into contact with something fundamentally, exquisitely pure and serene.

He was in the right mood to appreciate the simple, hearty hospitality of the Cobbler's Arms when he arrived there, but when he saw Martin's blank downcast face as he hurried towards him, he saw immediately that something was seriously wrong.

"They say they are so full up that they've given up their own bedroom, and are sleeping in the kitchen; never had such a flood of visitors before, and still they keep coming. All the lodgings are full, also, because I've enquired at every place in the village," said Martin, ruefully, almost as if he was to blame for Lynton's sudden popularity.

Gerald Graham bit his lip and frowned; he strode into the little reception room and interviewed the apologetic landlord.

"I'm sorry, but what I told your man is quite true, sir. However, there's a couple of rooms falling vacant in three days' time, and I'll speak to Miss Harland, her that was governess of the school for thirty years; she sometimes obliges me by putting up folks for a day or two, but she don't let regular, and only does it as a favour," said the landlord, eyeing his would-be guest very sharply as if wondering whether or not he should pass him on to the lady who did not "let regular."

Gerald Graham felt a sudden leaping of his pulses, and the blood raced pleasantly along his veins.

He smiled his most charming smile, and assured the landlord of the Cobbler's Arms that he would be most delighted if Miss Harland would consent to receive him and his companion.

"I'll send my daughter along of you then, and she'll explain," said the man, who was the means of writing the first chapter in one of the strangest, saddest love stories that ever befell a girl.

### CHAPTER III.

**M**ISS Harland and Daisy were sitting at tea when the trio entered the little chintz parlour.

"Oh, it's *you*! Auntie, this is the gentleman I was telling you about," said the young girl, jumping to her feet, and offering chairs for the guests.

"Father says if you'll be so kind, will you put up these two gentlemen till Monday, then he'll have them," explained the stolid, apple-cheeked girl, who had been sent with them, all in a breath.

Miss Harland smiled, and when a gracious, kindly gentlewoman whose days have been full and peaceful, smiles, it is like a benison to the soul of a jaded city dweller.

"We shall be delighted, my niece and I. Will you not join us at tea? Nellie," this to the diminutive maid who was the cottage "help," "Will you please bring two large cups and saucers and two plates."

Gerald Graham's quick eyes noted the cups which already adorned the little tea-table; they were of egg-shell china, very delicate and dainty, and that small detail pleased his fastidious sense mightily.



"Oh, it's putting you to an immense amount of trouble. I'm really very sorry," he exclaimed, in great concern, as he rose to take the tea table reinforcements from the little maid.

"This is my friend, Mr. Martin Eversley," he said, indicating Martin with a careless wave of his hand.

Miss Harland bowed, and Daisy flashed him a bright smile, but they both looked rather curiously at him, too.

He seemed so utterly and entirely out of place in that dainty, low-ceilinged room of silver and old-fashioned chintz-covered furniture. His huge, muscular frame seemed to belong to the untamed jungle or the wild, uncivilised wastes of the earth.

Gerald Graham was at home in almost any environment so long as it was refined and conventional, and he soon found himself discussing modern educational systems with Miss Harland and the grave-eyed young girl, as if he had known them for years.

Martin, on the other hand, spoke scarcely a word, and was pitifully confused and awkward. It was not that he did not know how to use his table implements, and his manners were as perfect in their way as those of his master. He had long mastered the correct way to eat and drink and behave at table.

It was none of these things that troubled the raw, uncouth son of many lands.

It was the sight of Daisy, in her simple holland gown, and all the fresh glory of her youth.

As he looked at her ever-changing countenance, and listened to her low, beautifully modulated voice, a vision of other women whom he had met casually in the far-distant, polyglot corners of the earth, came to him. They rushed into his mind and became a long gallery of portraits, all ranged alongside this fair, sweet blossom of English girlhood.

He saw the white, peaked faces of American factory girls, the swarthy ones of the South, the women of the cattle camps, and the cigarette-smoking viragoes of Mexico. These in turn, gave place to Japanese women, curious little creatures in their wooden shoes, and to brown-skinned daughters of the South Sea Isles, with flower-wreaths in their dusky hair.

Under that mask of invariable calm, Martin was a mass of quivering sensibilities, his nature was like a harp which every wind stirred to a different tune.

The pool of life lies still and dark until Love comes to sweep it into gleaming spray, no matter how full of adventures of another kind it may have been, and Love came to play on the strings of Martin Eversley's heart that night, and the tune was so wildly, wondrously sweet that it robbed his eyes of sleep, and his mind of every thought save one, and that was, that Daisy, the girl he loved, was dreaming her white, girlish dreams under the same roof, and to-morrow, in a few brief hours, he would see her again.

## CHAPTER IV

**D**AISY, my little flower, my pearl amongst women, you *must* listen to what I say. I love you—do you hear, little heart of the world? I want you to be my wife.”

Genuine passion fired Gerald Graham's heart, genuine love, as far as he was capable of feeling the greatest emotion that life offers, looked from his eyes and throbbed in every note of his rich, cultured voice.

Julia Milburn, to forget whom he had come to Lynton, was quite forgotten; never had he loved as now, with every ounce of feeling he possessed, every fibre of his whole being.

He felt that the rest of his life would be a dreary, futile waste unless he could win Daisy for his bride.

That she had nothing—not a penny except fifty pounds and Miss Harland's life insurance at death which was that dear lady's legacy to her adopted niece, did not in the least matter. Gerald Graham had far more than enough for two, and when an uncle died, he would be Lord Geldon, even richer, and with one of the oldest titles in England.

Daisy did not know how rich he was, nor did she care.

She would have cheerfully borne poverty, and care, and sorrow, she told herself with all the brave, untried enthusiasm of her eighteen years, if only she had by her side the man she loved—Gerald Graham.

They stood together, hatless, on the summit of a wind-swept hill, the smack of salt upon their cheeks, all around them rolling stretches of cloud-shadowed dawn, no sound but the shrill mourn of the peewit, and the moaning of the sea.

“Look up, little one, and tell me if I may hope.”

The words came softly and clearly, falling each like a little chime of silver bells on Daisy’s happy heart.

What is there in life to equal the first freshness of a young girl’s love?

“I—oh, I do love you, Gerald. I’ve always loved you, I think, ever since that day by the gate—you remember, don’t you?” the sweet voice faltered, bashfully.

“Shall I ever forget, my heart’s treasure?” asked Gerald Graham, as he pressed eager, passionate loving kisses upon the upturned face, and eyes, and hair.

The hours passed, the shadows lengthened, and the sound of sheep going homewards came from afar.

“There’s no need for us to wait, darling, is there? I’d like you to meet my mother and sisters first, and then we’ll be married in London, next month, I think,” said Gerald, making a rapid mental survey of his arrangements.



"Oh Gerald, so soon as that? Are—are you quite sure that you can afford it? I mean, it takes such a lot to get married now," said Daisy, so sweetly serious that her lover stopped her mouth with a kiss.

"Dear little goose, do you know the income of your future husband?" he asked, laughingly, slipping his hand beneath the dainty chin.

"Why, no!" Daisy's blue eyes were wide.

"Thirty thousand a year, and someday I shall be Lord Geldon, and you'll be Lady Geldon. How will you like that?" he asked, not in a boastful way, for there was nothing of the snob about Gerald Graham, but in a jocular, laughing manner.

To his surprise, Daisy was not overwhelmed with surprise and delight. She was very grave, and her voice was a little apprehensive as she said, "Oh, I am sorry about that, Gerald—indeed I am, dear. You see," she added, speaking quickly, and with a little quick intake of her breath, "I am not only a poor village girl, but I am a nameless waif. Miss Harland is not my aunt—she only took me in and brought me up out of pity. Your mother and sisters and all your friends will expect you to marry somebody in your own station of life—not a girl without even parents to refer them to. Oh, Gerald, I am so sorry, because—because I love you so much—too much to do anything which will make for ultimate unhappiness," she finished, in a little, choked whisper.

Gerald Graham loved her more than ever for

her obviously sincere reluctance ; he wondered how many girls would have looked at the matter from such a standpoint.

" Beloved, what you are, or who you are, does not matter—the fact that you are your own sweet, precious self is all that counts," he said, as he took her in his eager arms.

The pair walked back through the flower-scented lanes, the sweetest of all earth's songs making music in their hearts, and they were so engrossed in each other that they were almost run down by a motor car, driven by one woman, and containing another, which swerved suddenly round a bend in the lane.

" Didn't you hear us ? " demanded a woman's voice, sharply, out of the gathering dusk.

Gerald Graham let go of his sweetheart's arm as if it had been a hot brick. His hand flew to his hat.

" What a wonderful thing to meet you here, Julia—I mean Mrs. Milburn,"—he hastily corrected himself—said Gerald Graham, in a curiously abashed voice.

Daisy looked gravely at the beautiful, dark-eyed woman who leaned out of the car, and extended a slim hand to her former lover.

" My darling boy ! Well, of all the lovely surprises, to meet you in this little dog's hole of a place that Jack insists is ideal for a honeymoon because it's so beautiful and quaint." The full red lips, like the petals of a crimson flower, made a delightful grimace.

Daisy drew back into the shadow of the trees which lined the lane, feeling suddenly hurt and left out of things.

For the first time in her manless young life, she felt a pang of jealousy, and it was sharp and stabbing, in exact proportion to the love which filled her heart.

It was sweet to hear the word "honeymoon" escape from the beautiful lips, because it indicated that the woman who called her lover "darling boy" had a husband.

"But she shouldn't call other men by endearing names; she should keep them for her husband," thought Daisy, with a little throb of indignation.

She had no time for further thought. Recovering from his astonishment at the unexpected meeting, Gerald Graham suddenly drew her gently out of the shadow of the trees, and said, presenting her to the beautiful woman in the car, "Will you allow me to introduce my—er—fiancee, Miss Daisy Harland?"

Daisy fancied that there was just a shade of awkwardness in her lover's tone, and for a second the large dark eyes flashed over her from head to foot, with something more than a hint of antagonism in their depths.

Daisy extended her hand, feeling furious because she could not control the blush which overspread her face, making it the hue of the wild roses which starred the hedgerows.

"I am pleased to meet you," she murmured

to each of the women—Julia Milburn introduced her friend as Mrs. Rose—and she followed Gerald, who accepted the invitation to enter the car, with a feeling that cold water was being poured on to the warm, glowing reality of the most wonderful love story that had ever been.

“Where are you staying, Julia—in Lynton?” asked Gerald Graham, using the beautiful woman’s Christian name—a fact which did not escape Daisy’s attention.

But all the warmth and vividness of love was revived when they left the motor car, and walked hand-in-hand up the sweet-smelling garden path to the little cottage where Miss Harland was waiting for them.

“Oh, my darling, I hope you’ll be happy! Does Mr. Graham know everything?” she asked, a sudden note of apprehension in her silvery old voice.

“Yes, Miss Harland, Daisy has told me all about herself, but it makes not the slightest difference. Why should it?” asked Gerald Graham, simply.

All were happy that night beneath the red roof of the little Devonshire cottage—all, except Martin Eversley, whose face had been like a stone mask ever since he had heard the news.

He liked his employer; he more than liked him, and he was intensely grateful to him for all that he had done, but, as a man with the natural aptitude for reading other men, he knew his limitations



and just how deeply he could feel. Some women he could have made happy—women who measured a man's love by his possessions—but never, never while he lived, could he hope to hold a woman such as Daisy would one day become.

"She's a child yet, but she's made of ice and fire beneath that calm, sweet surface, and she's unaware of it. There's a certain man made for every woman, it is said, and I believe it to be true. Daisy was made for me, not for a city-bred fellow like Graham, and I was made for her," groaned the man who was tasting the bitters of love before the sweets.

## CHAPTER V

**D**AISY'S hair would have been a hair-dresser's delight ; it obeyed every twist of her little hand, every fancy of her girlish brain, and as she turned this way and that before the glass, she surveyed it anxiously from every possible angle. She was so anxious to look as nice as she possibly could.

Lady Diana Pierman, a friend of Gerald Graham, who had rented a large furnished house on the outskirts of the village for the remainder of the summer, was giving a garden party, and Daisy was invited to it.

She had been obliged to take her class before attending the party, as no substitute could be found ; but the children had been dismissed half an hour earlier, to enable her to rush back to the little cottage and dress.

Gerald, too, was to meet her in the little spinney near Lady Diana's house. He would watch for her coming, he told her, and slip away directly he saw her in the distance. He would have waited for her, only Lady Diana had begged him to help her with the other guests.

The afternoon sun gleamed and shone on the emerald and diamond ring which Daisy had worn for a week on her left hand.

She chose a soft white dress and pinned a pink blush rose in her belt. A pink rose was in her big shady hat, but, as a matter of fact, the young girl needed no adornment except her own fresh beauty.

“Will he think that I look nice? Shall I do him credit before all these people?”

Daisy tortured her little head with these and similar thoughts, as girls have done ever since the time of the first lover.

“He loves me! How wonderful it is! He has never loved a girl before, just as I have never before loved a man,” said Daisy, happily, as she walked quickly up the hill which led to the house where the party was in full swing.

The shortest way to the big wrought iron gates lay through a little spinney, and the path was not often used, for several stiles had to be surmounted before it could be reached.

But stiles make no difference to nimble eighteen; indeed, Daisy was so joyously happy that she almost vaulted them.

She was a little too soon, according to the watch on her wrist, but it would be pleasant to sit in the shade awhile, and wait his coming.

Everything was so cool, and hushed, and calm in this tiny, out-of-the-way corner of the village. Daisy felt as if she were walking the aisles of some great cathedral as she leaned against the bole of an oak tree and tried to peer through the thick bushes in order to catch the first glimpse of her lover as he came.



The minutes passed happily—time is never too long when one is in love—and at length, on the still air, Daisy distinguished the sound of footsteps.

A sudden mischievous mood seized the girl who was still so much a child in many ways, despite her engagement ring.

“ I’ll hide behind a bush and spring out on him,” she told herself, merrily, with all the gay inconsequence of a care-free heart.

The young girl hid, as the mood seized her ; she went into the thicket a laughing, happy girl : when she left, the bitterest sorrow that the heart of woman knows was writ large and stamped indelibly on her fair young face.

Gerald Graham came through the thicket, but he was not alone. He did not expect Daisy for another fifteen minutes or so.

Julia Milburn was with him, dressed exquisitely in clothes such as the little country girl had read about, but had never seen.

They came slowly down the path together, their heads almost touching, and Gerald was giving the woman *that* look—the look which she thought nobody but she in all the wide world could bring to his face.

“ Goodbye, darling boy.”

They were very near now, coming towards her ; Daisy could smell the scent which the richly-dressed woman affected.

“ Goodbye.” She heard the word spoken again, and then all the blood rushed to her head in a mad,



singing torrent, leaving the rest of her body cold, cold as ice. Their lips met and clung together.

They had not parted when Daisy stepped out and faced the guilty pair.

All that has been written in song or told in story falls short of the reality of love and its effects. If Daisy had been anybody but herself, she might reasonably have made a scene when she beheld her affianced lover kissing another woman—and a married woman at that !

Or she might have been sarcastic, sneering ; instead of which she said, with a stark simplicity which made her words more effective than the heaviest torrent of abuse, " I have been here some time. I saw you kiss Mrs. Milburn."

The bold looking beauty in the most fashionable garments that her exquisite trousseau contained, had no more understanding of the horror of disillusioned youth than to laugh merrily.

The sound grated on the young girl's ears like the harsh, discordant laugh of a maniac, and even Gerald Graham, though he was less sensitive than his pure-hearted little sweetheart, inwardly raged at what he called " Julia's cackle."

" Oh, well, as you saw it all, you will know for yourself that nothing more serious than a kiss passed between us. We—we are old friends, you know, Miss Harland. In fact, we were once engaged."

There was an ill-concealed sneer in the elder woman's words, and her tone and manner implied

that Daisy had only secured what she herself had chosen to discard.

There was a note of deadly calm in the young girl's voice as she said, "I see," just that, and no more.

But the red blood of shame had risen to Gerald Graham's brow; he felt unutterably small and mean, and for the first time which he could remember he was at a loss for words.

This phase was succeeded by one of acute annoyance; he actually felt himself ill-used because Daisy had seen that stolen kiss, and his egotism drove him to an attitude of defence rather than to one of apology.

"Hang it all, Daisy, there's no need to look as if I'd run away and actually accorded to some other woman what I have promised you—the doubtful privilege of marriage!" he said, finishing with the jerky, mirthless laugh of the person ill at ease, trying to make a joke.

Daisy's heart seemed to have slipped out of her bosom, and in its place there seemed to be a large piece of lead, which weighed down every other emotion and robbed her of all feeling save that of disgust. She spoke quietly, but her youthful scorn permeated every tone of her beautifully modulated voice.

"I think that you are quite right to apply the adjective 'doubtful' to what you call the privilege of marriage with you, Mr. Graham. I—I suppose you thought that it was quite safe to act in such a

way towards a country girl. I believe it is a fact that men who live in towns and cities look to the village girls to supply them with their summer—sport.”

The words struck Gerald Graham like the lashes of a whip across his face. He was quite genuinely in love with Daisy, and one kiss from her lips was more to him than all he had had from Julia Milburn, even in the days when they were engaged to each other.

He attempted to put his arm around the slim young shoulders, but Daisy withdrew herself very firmly and decidedly.

“I say, Daisy, you must listen to me—you shall!” cried the repentant lover, using his superior masculine strength to detain the unwilling girl. “I swear that I haven’t been playing with you, darling, and in proof of it, I’ll marry you to-morrow—to-night, even—by special license if you’ll have me. Don’t be so cruel, Daisy—don’t punish me any more for such a little thing as a kiss, lightly taken and, of course, just as lightly given, for Mrs. Milburn is a married woman,” he finished, eagerly, as if that fact were extenuating circumstance.

“Yes, that is greatly to her shame,” observed Daisy, without appearing to have heard the rest of the sentence.

Julia Milburn’s splendid dark eyes flashed with anger as she listened to her former lover’s protestations of faithfulness to the little chit of a country girl—a village lout, which was the ridiculous

designation that her small mind chose to apply to the girl who was more beautiful, far better educated, and quite as intelligent, though not so subtle and crafty, as herself.

"Really, Gerald, I feel quite out of place in this affecting little scene. I will leave you and Miss Harland to bring to a finish the comedy of the stolen kiss," and with another look of mingled dislike and contempt at Daisy, Julia Milburn walked off, humming a little air.

"Darling, if you'll only forgive me, such a thing will never happen again as long as I live," said the weak, unstable lover, when they were alone.

Daisy was not the first girl in love to imagine that such lapses would never recur, just because the beloved one gave his solemn word that they would not.

But, though she forgave and sealed her forgiveness with a kiss, there was no denying the fact that the bloom had been brushed off the fine flower of her romance, and the knowledge that she was, at least, the second girl in her lover's life—and perhaps there had been others?—rankled bitterly in her fresh, girlish heart, and robbed her future husband of that wonderful, impossible halo that girls of all time have placed round the heads of the men who are their lovers.

"Put this on again, precious, and tell me once more that you'll forget all about that ridiculous kiss," said Daisy's lover, slipping on the ring that she had taken from her left hand and offered him.



Daisy did as she was told, and she felt angry with herself because the leaden feeling in her heart persisted and would not let her feel the same light-hearted, joyous girl who had entered the wood only half an hour before.

"I don't think that I want to go to the party now, Gerald. Would you mind if we went home?" asked Daisy, after a somewhat awkward little silence.

Her lover jumped to his feet with great readiness; he, too, was bashful about returning to the throng of guests on the lawn, which included Julia Milburn.

"Of course not, darling. We'll cut the party and toddle, if you like," said Gerald Graham, in a genuine attempt at lightheartedness, as he took Daisy's arm in his own.

"I—er—I hardly like to mention it, dear, but—er——" Daisy's lover paused and coughed, and got very red—"I hope you won't think it necessary to tell your aunt about our little tiff?" he finished awkwardly.

"I will not tell Auntie," promised Daisy, but it was the first secret that she had ever had from the gentle little lady at whose knees she had learned her prayers, and her pillow that night was wet with tears.

## CHAPTER VI

**W**HAT'S that you are reading, Martin ? ”  
It was almost midnight in Miss Harland's dainty cottage. She and Daisy and the little maid had long ago gone to bed, but a can of paraffin oil was always placed outside the door of the sitting room for Gerald Graham or more often, his companion, to use on their late nights.

It was quite customary for Martin Eversley to sit up all night, reading and writing, and Miss Harland, who hated tobacco smoke, readily forgave the smoker when her servant reported that she had found Mr. Eversley up when she came to do the grate in the morning. Miss Harland forgave him because she was so full of admiration for the dogged pluck and illimitable perseverance of her young lodger.

“ Come to me whenever you need help, and I will do all I can to assist you,” she said, in relation to Martin's studies.

Martin had accepted with a simple gratitude that brought tears to the little lady's eyes, but in less than six weeks he had exhausted her store of knowledge ; she found that his studies were beyond her.

"He really is a most remarkable young man, and a very charming one, too," Miss Harland said to Daisy, one night.

"Is he, Auntie? I hardly ever see him. I think that he does not like me very much, because he always seems to avoid me," said Daisy, with a laugh.

How could she know that it was torture to the man, who had no place even in her thoughts, to sit in the same room with her, to listen to the crystal clear voice singing, speaking, or laughing, and to know that never, while he lived, would he be able to drive the image of Daisy Harland from his mind, not even when she became the wife of another man.

But, though he was cruelly alive to the hopelessness of his love, Martin did not droop and laze, and otherwise behave like the hero in a melodrama. He knew nothing of the traditions which are supposed to apply to the unwanted lover, and because he was so splendidly healthy in every way, he sought of his own accord the finest anodyne for trouble that the world has to give—unlimited work.

He did not needlessly torture himself by seeking out the object of his affections; instead, he applied himself to his studies with added vigour, telling himself that, because of her, his little queen, he would win the laurels that all men covet—fame and power, and an honoured place amongst his fellows, and these things should be a memorial

to the love that was never allowed to flower, although Daisy would never know.

If his employer had merely been desirous, just as he was, of winning Daisy for his bride, and the field open to both—that is, Daisy not engaged to either—he would have overridden the barriers between himself and Gerald Graham, and have fought for the girl he loved as men did in the beginning, showing no mercy, as is the manner of all men when a woman is the stake.

But Daisy had settled the matter by declaring her preference, and so he was bound to stand aside, and stifle the passion which sometimes swept over him like a flood-tide, swamping everything save that bitter ache at his heart which, in men of the Martin Eversley type, knows no ease until Death's voice calls.

The window of the little cottage parlour was open, and the night scents from the sleeping flowers came up in deliriously sweet waves to the nostrils, bringing with them a magic peace and freedom from petty cares.

Although they had "made it up," as the children say, Gerald Graham was feeling far from comfortable, but perhaps it would be more accurate to describe his twinges of conscience as pinpricks to his personal vanity; the man does not breathe who is averse to posing as a hero to his bride-to-be.

Somehow, Gerald Graham felt the need for a confidante; but if only he could have foreseen the results he would have kept the still tongue



which the sages of old ascribed to the wise head, on that still, flower-scented evening.

He opened the conversation by asking Martin what he was reading.

Martin Eversley looked up, and the naked light streaming down on his fine face, revealed eyes that were a little tired, and there were lines deeply graven at the sides of his mobile sensitive mouth.

"Oh, I'm not working seriously, Mr. Graham. I've finished for to-night, but I was just dipping into the poems that Thomas Moore wrote. I don't think much of them; they don't ring true."

Martin spoke simply and as one quite willing to back his own opinion, but he was developing a splendid critical faculty, and Gerald Graham privately agreed with what he said.

But something seemed to strike him as tremendously funny; he threw back his sleek dark head and laughed until Martin was obliged to laugh in sympathy with him.

"Oh, you are wrong about Moore not ringing true, Martin—you are, really! What about this little gem of advice?" Gerald Graham leaned forward in his armchair, and, taking his cigar out of his mouth, quoted a few lines from a well-known Irish ballad:—

"Then, oh! what pleasure, whene'er we rove  
To be sure to find something, still, that is dear,  
And to know, when far from the lips that we love,  
We've but to make love to the lips we are near."

"I tested the truth of that this afternoon in

Redwood Spinney, and enjoyed it until my lady came along and caught me in the middle of the naughty boy act."

Graham laughed—not the open, careless laugh of a boy, but the self-confident laugh of the seasoned man of the world, who, while not being exactly unworthy of a true, pure love, is inclined to dissipate his own in many different directions.

"Came along and caught me right in the act; funny thing Julia Milburn turning up like that," commented Martin's employer, more to himself than to his companion, as he replaced his cigar.

He was too self-absorbed to note the effect that his lightly spoken words had on Martin Eversley, who had dropped his book on the floor, and was staring at him with all the pent-up, mighty force of his emotions in his deeply set, angrily gleaming grey eyes.

Martin was tired—deadly tired, for this was his second night without sleep—but the blood rushed to his head in a surging, singing torrent, and the whole universe held nothing but himself and his love for the sweet-eyed, pure young girl who, perhaps, was shedding tears at that moment in the room above their heads for the man who told as a joke the fact that he had dared to kiss another woman in sight of her whom he was soon to make his wife.

The fire in the grey eyes smouldered until they looked red-rimmed and terrible; the sensitive nostrils quivered with each breath Martin Eversley

drew through his strong, white teeth. Again the blood pounded, singing, in his head, and his employer, instead of representing a very average man to his fevered eyes, seemed to become a menacing monster who threatened to overwhelm the girl he loved with ruin and disaster.

But he held himself in with an iron resolve ; he wanted to hear from Gerald Graham's own lips the fact that it was Daisy whom he meant—she, and no other !

His voice, ordinarily very deep, but smooth and pleasant, sounded harsh and strained as he said, " You were speaking about Miss Harland just now ? Was it she who caught you kissing Mrs. Milburn ? "

" Yes, worse luck ! But it's all done with. I smoothed it over with the little girl, and we are the best of friends again. But, I say, Martin, you are looking a positive wreck, man ! Get off to bed with you," and Gerald Graham looked genuinely concerned, as, indeed, he was.

But Martin did not hear the last part of the lightly spoken sentence ; he only had room for one thought in his mind at that moment. The relationship of the two men was no longer that of employer and employed ; both were men, in love with the same woman, and she had been made to suffer by the weaker of the two.

Martin's employer was amazed to see him jump from his seat, and come towards him with his great brown fist upraised.

"You think that your conduct—that of a cur and not a man—in letting that little white angel upstairs see you kiss another woman, is going to pass unpunished? Don't you believe it, my fine, city-bred bucko! Smoothed it over with Daisy, have you? Well, you haven't smoothed it over with me, so take that—and that."

There was the horrible sound of a powerful naked fist striking soft flesh; both men were strong, but Gerald Graham was in no sense of the word a match for Martin, all afire as he was with indignation and jealousy.

Chairs were overturned and Miss Harland's precious china cabinet, filled with dainty pieces that were heirlooms, came crashing to the ground, the contents smashing like egg shells as they touched the floor.

"I'll—I'll murder you for this!" Gerald Graham gasped, as, with the blood trickling from a wound in his cheek, he tried to force Martin towards the open window. The parlour was almost flush with the garden, and the distracted man had a vague idea that he might be able to force his opponent's body through the window, out into the garden.

He almost succeeded, but, by a clever trick learned in Japan, Martin, instead, threw him.

With a roar of baffled anger, Gerald Graham felt the ground slip from beneath him, and the next second he was unconscious, for he fell heavily, head first, against the old-fashioned steel fender, striking his left temple, and becoming as still and



white as if Death had already marked him for its own.

There followed an unquiet silence, unquiet in the sense that a perfect pandemonium of sound was making itself heard in Martin Eversley's overwrought brain.

He was staring stupidly down at his employer's blood-stained figure, one hand held to his throbbing aching temples, when Daisy herself appeared in the doorway, her lovely little face pale and startled, her golden hair hanging to her waist in a thick rope, a blue dressing gown partly covering her slim little figure, and a lighted candle in her hand.

The dark brows that were in such curious contrast to her eyes and hair drew together in a little puzzled frown; as a matter of fact the young girl was not yet fully awake, and she did not at once grasp the meaning of the overturned chairs and tables, the smashed china, and general air of ruin.

But she advanced a little further into the room, the candle held high above her head, and it was the sight of her lover lying in a little pool of his own blood that brought her half-sleeping faculties into full play.

A terrified shriek rang through the little cottage; dimly Martin Eversley realised that he should attempt to soothe the girl who was the indirect cause of the wild scene of disorder that her eyes were witnessing.

"Don't be frightened, Daisy," he said, hoarsely, unconsciously using the name that he always

called her to himself, " he kissed another woman, didn't he ? "

An older person than Daisy would have immediately deduced that Martin was on the verge of a breakdown, probably even in the first stages of brain-fever ; but Daisy had no knowledge of such things, and even if she had, she had no thoughts to spare from her lover, whose head she was holding on her lap, while she murmured all the sweet, endearing terms that she knew in her frantic grief. But her utter oblivion to all outside things only lasted for a few seconds ; her lover's urgent need stirred her to action.

" Cannot you get some water, and please go at once for the doctor. I—I believe Mr. Graham is dying, if he is not already dead," cried Daisy, turning her blue, distracted eyes upon Martin, who still stood in an attitude of apparent carelessness, his lips moving and sound coming from them, though the young girl could not distinguish the words.

" And when we are far from the lips that are dear, We've but to make love to the lips that are near."

Martin took no notice of Daisy's commands, but kept repeating the two lines that had been the opening of the fatal confidence which his master had reposed in him.

He was still repeating them when Miss Harland, who was a heavier sleeper than Daisy, appeared in the doorway, lightly clad, and also with a candle in her hand.

When she saw the nearest approach to a relative that she had ever had, Daisy broke down, and her hot, youthful tears fell like rain on the still, cold face in her lap.

"Auntie, Gerald's dead—I'm sure that dreadful man has killed him! And he won't get me any water!" Daisy sobbed, as she flashed a reproachful glance at Martin, who was still murmuring the lines which were quite unintelligible to both the women.

But Miss Harland's older, wiser eyes peered anxiously into the lean brown face of the man who was apparently quite unconscious of the holocaust that had been made in her once charming room; she did not like the sound of that low monotonous voice. She drew her own conclusions in a few seconds.

"Daisy, it is you who must dress yourself and go for the doctor; Mr. Eversley is ill—he is delirious, in fact—and I'll see to Mr. Graham if you will run upstairs and get my keys and then fetch the brandy from the small cupboard in the dining room. You must not give way, for these men's plight is worse than your own."

The sensible words had a sobering effect on Daisy, and she rushed upstairs and was down again with the brandy in a few seconds.

"He—he isn't dead, Auntie, is he?" she asked, fearfully, as she saw Miss Harland force a few drops of the liquid between her lover's teeth.

"Certainly not; he'll probably pull round

before the doctor comes, but," Miss Harland indicated the gash on his cheek and the big bruise just above his temple, "these will need skilled care, so hurry all you can."

Daisy rushed off again to obey orders, and meanwhile Miss Harland tried to get a sensible answer to the question she addressed to Martin Eversley, but failed.

"How did it all happen?" she asked over and over again, as she tried to coax Martin to take a little brandy.

Her kind old eyes were moist as she saw that he did not recognise her. Martin Eversley, the great-hearted wanderer in many lands, the most avid seeker after knowledge that she had ever known, had somehow crept right into the heart of the gentle little lady who was rarely at fault in her judgment of character.

The destruction of her treasured pieces of china—although most of the furniture had been overturned, there was no damage done in that direction—hurt her cruelly, but she found that it hurt still more to reflect that, unless he received the utmost care and attention, Martin Eversley must be lost to the world.

"And the world needs all its mighty men—men who are mighty of brain and heart, as well as body," she murmured, as she picked up the limp, cold hand, which hung heavily over the chair in which Martin sat.

She bathed the bruise on Gerald Graham's



forehead and attended to the cut on his cheek, but, strangely enough, his more palpable hurt did not touch her nearly as profoundly as Martin Eversley's ceaseless raving about making love to lips that were near.

"This fellow has had some tremendous mental shock, and that, on top of severe brain fag, has resulted in temporary insanity. He's Mr. Graham's man, isn't he?" said the doctor who came back with Daisy.

"Yes. I do not know what has happened, but it certainly looks as if there had been a quarrel before Mr. Graham fell and struck his head on the fender. My china cabinet was on the floor, its contents smashed, and several chairs and a small table were overturned. Daisy was the first to hear disturbed sounds. I came down later," said Miss Harland, as she bustled about getting the things that the doctor wanted.

After some time, Gerald Graham pulled round, and was assisted to bed by the doctor, but Martin was a different proposition. He flatly refused to move, and it was impossible for the doctor, who was a little man, to use force with him.

"His will be a long illness unless I am greatly mistaken. Perhaps we had better not try to persuade him any further. I will ring up the Infirmary in St. Marychurch to see if there is a bed, and if so the ambulance will come along within an hour to fetch him."

Daisy turned wide, surprised eyes upon her

adopted aunt when she heard that good little lady say, with a great deal of feeling in her voice, "No, doctor, I will nurse him here myself. I know what to do, for I once nursed my brother through an attack of brain-fever. Somehow, I—I think that I could prevent the attack from developing its worst aspects."

"And what about Gerald, Auntie? Who is to nurse him?" asked Daisy, feeling, for the second time in her young life, a twinge of jealousy.

"He has many friends, besides a mother and sisters, while this poor fellow has nobody," was Miss Harland's reply, whose heart was big enough to take in the whole of humanity.

## CHAPTER VII

MARTIN Eversley peered at the lovely picture which Daisy made through the veiling of his long, thick eyelashes ; he was supposed to be fast asleep.

She had never been alone with him before ; the little lady to whom he owed so very much had been obliged to go out, and as it was Saturday, and a holiday for Daisy, her aunt had asked if she would mind sitting by Martin's side, and giving him his medicine if he awoke.

" Yes, Auntie, I'll do it, but I can never forget that it was he who thrashed Gerald in such a horribly brutal fashion," said Daisy, with a hint of tears in her voice.

It was nearly a fortnight since the midnight scene in the parlour, and Gerald Graham had given his sweetheart a more or less true account of the incident, omitting, naturally, to tell Daisy what had led up to it.

" I cannot tell you the cause of our quarrel, dearest. It is not a fit subject for you, and though I am refraining from handing the fellow over to the police, I am not doing so out of consideration for him, but for myself and the mater and the girls, and you, too, of course ! " he added.

" Oh, I hate the great brute ! How—how dared he lay hands upon you—you who have done so much for him ! " cried Daisy, indignantly, expressing herself more strongly than she had ever done in all her life before.

Miss Harland was very quiet and reserved in her manner when Daisy, with tears in her blue eyes, repeated what her lover had said about Martin.

Since the advent of Gerald Graham to the cottage, Daisy had been obliged to give up her room and sleep with her aunt. On the night of the incident in Redwood Spinney, Daisy had kept her awake until a very late hour by repeating, over and over again, the whole story of her quarrel with her sweetheart. As she had not given the confidence voluntarily, Miss Harland said nothing about it, but when Martin, in his ravings, also told the story of his quarrel with his employer, it did not take such an intelligent woman long to piece the two together, and arrive at what was a perfectly true conclusion.

From the first, she had recognised Martin's enormous superiority of intellect and character over that of his more highly polished, conventional employer, and had appreciated him accordingly ; hence her very cool reception of Daisy's indignant remarks about him.

Gerald Graham had gone home to his people. Julia Milburn, with her young husband and an exquisitely running car, had volunteered to drive him all the way to London. Daisy's lover had



consented, and she watched the woman who had so far been her evil star, drive off with an ill-concealed smile of triumph, and her unusually gentle, but essentially feminine little heart was filled with anger when she saw the other woman deliberately rearrange the rugs which she had tucked about her lover in some way of her own.

"How dare she! She has her own husband, and Gerald belongs to me—to me!" repeated Daisy as she rushed indoors out of the sun to hide the tears which blinded her eyes.

It was a week ago since Gerald had gone, and his face kept coming between Daisy and her work whether she was teaching at the school, helping Miss Harland in the house, or doing needlework for her trousseau, as at the present moment.

But there were no signs of an inward disturbance on her fair face as she sat, outwardly tranquil and calm as some beautiful young nun, stitching at Martin Eversley's bedside.

Miss Harland's unremitting care and kindness had broken the force of the attack which had threatened the young working-man author, and, though the doctor had insisted on a thorough rest from books, Martin's splendid vitality had so far reasserted itself that physically he was almost himself again, and it was only the insistence of his self-constituted nurse that kept him confined to the couch in the little chintz parlour during the long, dreamy summer afternoons.

As he watched Daisy through his half-closed

lids, she seemed like some wonderful princess out of a fairy tale to his fervid, romantic imagination.

Never had there been so gracious a girl, never had so lovely a creature been made to torture the very soul out of a man.

As Martin watched the little pink-nailed fingers taking the dainty stitches in some white, filmy material, he felt the whole force of his passion for this slender, bewitching girl rising like a river in flood, threatening to overpower all the defences that were levelled against it.

It was quite a simple thing—a tiny dimple in Daisy's soft wrist which suddenly caught his eye—that finally overthrew his scruples and gave rein to the sweet madness that was rioting along his veins.

Quite suddenly, Daisy felt the needlework which was engaging her attention taken gently from her hand. Martin Eversley leaned over the side of his couch, and catching her hand between his own, pressed hot, passionate kisses upon it.

"It's no use fighting against it any longer—not the slightest use in the world," he said, passion causing his low, powerful voice to tremble, while his grey eyes were bright as beacon lights. "I love you, Daisy, my little goddess, love every hair of your golden head, every breath from your sweet lips, every impulse of your heart."

Daisy lifted her golden head, and in her eyes was the shrinking, timid fear of a frightened child; something caught in her throat, and she

gave a tiny gasp, as if all the wind and air had suddenly departed from the world. But this phase only lasted the merest second, for it was succeeded by a sudden, blazing, passionate anger, all the more terrifying because the whole of Daisy's very quiet, peaceful life with Miss Harland had been free from violent emotion of any kind.

"Daisy, don't look so frightened, little one. I wouldn't hurt a hair of your dear golden head, and you know it. I—I was a fool to speak, I suppose, but illness weakens a fellow's hold on himself, somehow."

There was an infinite tenderness and yearning in the strong deep voice, and the look of misery and self-reproach in Martin Eversley's fine eyes would have wrung the heart of an older woman with pity. But Daisy was in the first wonderful flush of her youth, and youth is invariably harsh in its judgments when it should be most tender.

To Daisy Harland, the sick man's declaration of love was an insult, without the slightest extenuating circumstance. Had he not used his brute strength to thrash his benefactor, her lover, the man who was soon to call her wife! How, then, did he dare to speak such words to her, under the roof where he was being kept because he appealed to her aunt's mistaken sense of pity!

Daisy's heart was one great, devastating flame, which spread to her eyes as she said, with the calmness of scathing contempt, "Your offence is too deep and disgusting, considering the circum-



stances, for it to be mere foolishness, Mr. Eversley. You are infinitely worse than foolish to speak such words to me, knowing that I am already engaged to be married, and to whom. You are a cad—that is the only word to describe you—and no gentleman would have been guilty of such conduct.”

Each word, spoken so coldly and clearly, cut Martin Eversley like the lash of a whip. The colour flowed into his face, and his throat worked convulsively, as if he had some obstruction which he could not swallow; but he did not speak, and after giving him one more contemptuous glance, Daisy gathered up her needlework and was about to depart into another room, when a sadly attenuated hand was thrust out to stop her, and, greatly to her surprise, Daisy found herself sitting down once more, gazing with angry amazement at the invalid who obviously had something more to say.

“Miss Harland, you said just now that I was a cad, that no gentleman would speak to you of love in the circumstances that are, I suppose, common knowledge in the whole village. I grant you that, but sometimes things are very different from what they seem, and I would not have spoken like that if I had been in my usual health.”

The severe expression, which looked rather comical on Daisy's soft, girlish face, gave way to one which was more like that which the youngsters sometimes saw in the schoolroom, when she had to reprove them for some childish fault.



"Is that an apology, Mr. Eversley, because if so, I will accept it, and I want you to promise to forget all about me. There are heaps of nice girls in the world, you know—heaps even in this little village," Daisy added, quaintly.

A pale wraith of a smile hovered for a moment around Martin's lips.

"Thank goodness you didn't offer to be a sister to me," he murmured, as the faint smile lightened for a moment the gloom of his eyes.

Then, his passion suddenly rising again at the sight of the sweet lips that were so temptingly, maddeningly near, and yet so hopelessly far away, he said, earnestly, "When you can talk so lightly about forgetting, it shows that you have not yet learned even the beginning of Love's wonderful lesson. There will be no forgetting for me, Daisy; but some day it may be that you'll need a friend, even if you marry Gerald Graham."

"I cannot allow you to speak like this to me, Mr. Eversley. Let go of my hand, and try to behave like a gentleman, even if—"

Daisy checked the words upon her lips; indignation had forced them to rise, but she was far too gentle and finely natured to be a snob. She had not the faintest desire in the world to point out Martin's humble position in the social scale, but he, with a harsh, mirthless laugh, finished the sentence which courtesy had caused her to leave unspoken.

"Even if I am not one, but just a brutish, un-

educated clod—a common working man who is aspiring to be something better! Isn't that it, Daisy?" he said, and just a shade of wistfulness softened the hard, cynical tone of his voice.

Daisy did not answer; she bent her sunny head over her needlework, and her eyes were bright with anger to find her thoughts so well interpreted, while a blush overspread the whole delicate fairness of her face and neck, and even extended to her pretty ears.

"But there's one thing about it, I don't want anything but contact with the brains of the so-called upper classes, which, in some cases, are worth while, simply because they've had the time and opportunity for study and training, and I haven't. They can keep their birth and breeding, and long lines of noble ancestors, for my share. It doesn't seem to help a good number of them very much when it comes to behaving like simple ordinary, decent men."

He was thinking of Gerald Graham, his late employer, and he seemed to be speaking more to himself than to the girl at his side, who, after a curious look at the pale, arresting face, stole quietly from the room, her heart filled with a great unrest.

## CHAPTER VIII

**I** THINK, my dear, that an apology is certainly due to Mr. Eversley. You must tell him that you spoke in ignorance of what you now know to be a fact, and that you are sorry."

There was a firm, decided, almost a commanding note in Miss Harland's habitually gentle voice as she spoke to her adopted niece. For the first time in her life Daisy felt inclined to rebel against her authority.

"But—but, Auntie, he surely should'nt have spoken of love to me, for even what you have told me makes no difference to the fact that I am engaged."

Her sweet voice was pitched on a high, surprised note, and in her eyes was the proud intolerance of youth, struggling with the love and deference which she knew to be the older woman's just due.

They were seated in the little chintz and silver parlour. Martin was walking moodily at the furthest end of the rose garden, his hands behind his back, his splendid head bent low upon his breast, and in his whole attitude the dejection of a man who has received a staggering blow when least able to bear it.

The roses sent out exquisite streamers of scent

to his nostrils, and there was a young moon in the summer sky—a pale yellow sickle getting ready to gather a harvest of stars.

But, there was no beauty in the night, or the stars, or the flowers for Martin Eversley.

He felt utterly beaten, “down and out,” as he would have expressed it in the old, ignorant, inarticulate days.

Of what use was it for him to strive, and sweat, and work to educate himself, to fit himself for a position and a career for which he was not born? A choking feeling gripped his throat; he put up a pitifully pale, wasted hand and dragged open the neck of his soft shirt, letting the wind play upon the great, broad chest that had been the envy of many of his mates in the old days, which, now that they were gone, seemed, somehow, to have possessed a charm and a glamour that he knew, in his innermost heart, was utterly and entirely lacking.

In his weak, depressed state, the old life, the old haunts, the old companions, seemed to be calling him, to be thrusting out invisible hands like steel bands to draw him back and bind him more firmly than ever to themselves; once again he asked himself what was the object of his striving, what the goal of his dearest desire.

And, swift as lightning, came the answer to his questioning, and it was contained in one word—Daisy.

It was not for fame, for power, for money, for



posterity, for humanity in general that men strive, once they are gripped and held fast in the silken toils of love. It was for some woman, some dear, gracious creature like Daisy Harland, with dark gold hair, great blue eyes, and the sweet, innocent lips of a child.

It was for Daisy that he wanted to work and sweat and toil his way upwards, and she would have none of him. She was seated in a dainty room with a charming old gentlewoman not more than fifty yards away, and doubtless she was thinking, if not talking, about the lover who was not worth a single glance from her beautiful eyes, or the smallest place in her heart.

As a matter of fact, it was not Gerald Graham who was the subject of discussion in the tiny cottage parlour, but himself.

Miss Harland had finished telling her niece the story of the quarrel between the two men, and she ended up by saying, "There are few men in Martin's position who would have been so absolutely selfless, so blind to their own best interests, as to have shown their disapproval of their employer's conduct in such a way." After a short silence Miss Harland added, more to herself than to Daisy, "What a lover such a man would be! What a splendid husband some day for some lucky girl, when time has worked its cure!"

A pang of jealousy shot through Daisy as she listened. Never once had her aunt called her lover by his Christian name—he was always

"Mr. Graham," most punctiliously; but Martin Eversley was "Martin" to her!

"I do believe, Auntie dear, that you would rather I married Mr. Eversley than Gerald!"

There was a laugh in the girlish voice, and merry imps of mischief peeped out from Daisy's blue eyes; but both the laugh and the mischief faded, and crystallised into sheer amazement when Miss Harland said quietly, but with a great deal of emphasis, "I would—ininitely rather."

"My dear," she went on, in her calm, unhurried, and therefore very impressive fashion, "there are few men born into the world like Martin Eversley. He is a leader, not a follower, of other men, and he will make his mark on his generation. It is a pity that he has fallen in love, for the time spent in recovering from the blow in being rejected will be so much time lost in his advancement. Yet, on the other hand," for the first time a smile lightened the wise blue eyes behind the gold-rimmed glasses, and an affectionate look was flashed at Daisy, "I am not sure that it is not a better safeguard for him to have fallen in love with you rather than with another girl who, dazzled by his physical qualities, might marry and afterwards ruin him."

"He seems to have dazzled you, Auntie dear," observed Daisy, dropping a light kiss on the soft fringe of fluffy white curls as she spoke.

"Will you go down and settle the matter of that apology, my dear? It may weigh on his mind if you leave matters just where they are, and mental

rest is what the poor fellow most requires if he is to make a complete recovery."

For answer, Daisy stepped lightly out of the low window, and made her way across the grass towards Martin, who suddenly turned round and faced her.

The moon, which loves to play with white things, caught at her dress and bathed it in a faint silvery blue light.

She looked just in her right setting, amongst the tall, gaily tinted hollyhocks and stocks, and arum lilies, which grew in such friendly confusion in the little garden.

"I must get away from here in a few days; this madness of love will either kill me or drive me to an asylum. I'll write to old Joe Bennett and get him to fake up a story about wanting me for a nice light job—anything to serve as an excuse for leaving."

His sombre eyes were drinking in Daisy's beauty while these thoughts chased each other through his tired, overwrought brain, but suddenly, as she came nearer, she smiled, and then all thoughts of leaving vanished, and he stood still, wondering what could have worked the miracle of that charming, friendly smile.

"Mr. Eversley, do you mind if I take a turn with you? I've got something that I must say at once," and Daisy tried to fall into step, but found that she had to take two to her companion's one, and her merry, ringing laugh robbed the situation of awkwardness for both.

Martin Eversley looked straight ahead of him and waited for Daisy to begin.

He did not want to see the night wind making sport of that little fluffy bunch of dark gold curls at the nape of the white, slender neck ; in fact, he wanted to blind himself to the whole sweet witchery of the dainty figure at his side.

Daisy came to the point at once, more like a straight, honourable schoolboy than a girl who knows that she is beloved by the man to whom she is speaking.

" Mr. Eversley, I want to apologise very sincerely for the things I said to you this afternoon, but I didn't know the facts at the time, how you and Mr. Graham quarrelled because of a certain incident in connection with Mrs. Milburn."

A look of the utmost bewilderment spread itself over Martin's finely sensitive face ; he was all confusion and embarrassment, the blood flushing red on his neck and brow.

" How in the name of wonder did you or your aunt know ? Did Graham tell you ? " he enquired, knowing directly he had spoken that such could not be the case, for Daisy would have known before she railed at him for daring to tell her of his love.

" Auntie found out from what I said in my sleep, and from your own account of the fight while you were delirious. She says that you went over every word of what took place previous



to the fight until she knew the whole conversation off by heart."

"I see." Martin became thoughtful, and his white face, paler by contrast because the red flush had faded from brow and neck, grew very grave.

He was silent so long that Daisy thought he was not prepared to accept her apology.

"I hope you have forgiven my ignorant rudeness, Mr. Eversley," she said at length.

Martin suddenly came to a full stop, and turned and faced her. His eyes burned fiercely in his pale face, and the whole concentrated force of his love for Daisy seemed to look out from them, and engulf her with a strange warmth which she could not even dimly comprehend. Impossible for Martin to make his deep voice calm and ordinary as he spoke to her, the girl of his choice out of all the hundreds that he had met; it thrilled with the wild magic of that ageless force which is at the heart of the Universe as he said, "Please don't talk about apologising, Daisy. It—it is rather like a queen stooping to her lowest subject."

Daisy would not have been a normal girl if she could have listened to such words unmoved. Martin Eversley was no actor, he could not debase an emotion by simulating it, or dressing it up in fine words to serve some purpose of his own.

Daisy felt a curious lump come into her throat, and the tears suddenly stung her eyes for no reason that she could think of.

Martin broke the somewhat strained silence which fell between them.

"I frightened you this afternoon," he said. "God knows I don't want to frighten you, Daisy. You were quite right when you called me a cad; that's why there's no need to apologise. But you get into my blood—it mounts to my head like liquid fire, and I can feel it pounding and thrilling all through me. And then I don't seem to feel any barriers or social conventions, and that silly rot. I even forget that you are the promised wife of another man. The sheer glory and loveliness and graciousness of you drowns all else. That's what love does to a man, Daisy—it makes him forget all things but the beloved."

His whole face was lit up, his being transfigured by love. Daisy, almost against her will, thrilled to the sheer elemental magnetism of the man.

Why, at that moment, in the flower-scented garden, with the young moon riding so splendidly overhead, did the recollection of the kiss that Gerald had given Julia Milburn in the spinney come into her head?

She had forgiven Gerald, it would not occur again, why then was it so hard to forget?

Thick and fast upon the recollection of the stolen kiss came the remembrance of Julia Milburn's triumphant, sneering little smile as she undid the rugs which she herself had wrapped about her lover in the car, just, Daisy felt sure, to give her a stab of pain.

Instead of finding her apology difficult and somewhat humiliating, Daisy began to feel quite glad that she had obeyed her aunt's wishes in the matter.

She felt herself melting towards Martin Eversley ; at least, she no longer actively disliked him. He was bewildering, dismaying, disturbing, by his very forcefulness ; but he was big, and it was this fact which hammered itself into Daisy's consciousness, and gave her a new standard of values, as well as a great respect, for the man at her side.

Martin Eversley made all the men she had ever met—except her lover of course—seem stupid, half-developed schoolboys in comparison with himself.

She held out her hand with a winning little smile.

"I am forgiven, then, and we are friends?" she said, prettily.

Martin caught the little hand, soft as the petals of a flower, between both his own, and then, very reverently he raised it to his lips.

"No, we cannot be friends, and we cannot ever meet as such ; that is why I must go away from this place," he said. "Friendship is a beggar's portion at the feast of love," he finished, with a pain-twisted little smile.

## CHAPTER IX

**T**HE knowledge that she was such a disturbing element in Martin Eversley's life troubled Daisy, in a vague, nebulous sort of fashion; it was not a clearly defined feeling, simply because no solution of the difficulty presented itself to the young girl's mind.

Miss Harland, her work in the village school, and her various local activities, represented the boundaries and landmarks of her life, and it just did not occur to Daisy to uproot them.

However, the question was answered for her in a manner which was to have very definite and far-reaching results.

About three days after their conversation in the garden—since when they had purposely avoided each other as much as possible—a letter arrived for Daisy, her first love letter, for Gerald Graham's communications with her since his departure had taken the form of telegrams, which were highly unsatisfactory, as well as expensive, things to Daisy's mind.

But this morning a thick cream envelope, with a bulky enclosure, arrived, and, with heightened colour and quickly beating heart, Daisy took it up to her bedroom to read it.



"My own darling," it commenced, and Daisy seemed to hear the soft, caressing voice speak the words, "I am so much better, I am glad to say, and there is no trace of Tarzan's attentions, you will be pleased to know."

"Tarzan" was the nickname that Gerald Graham had laughingly given Martin, because of his enormous strength and virility.

Somehow, Daisy found herself unable to smile at the reference; indeed, it brought a feeling of pain, seeing that her lover need not have incurred his wounds if he had refrained from boasting about a certain highly discreditable incident.

But Daisy was still very much in love, and at the commencement, one forgives, if the promise of amendment be sufficiently sincere.

The latter part of the letter threw Daisy into ecstasies of delight.

Without stopping to think, with all the heedless impetuosity of youth, she dashed down the few stairs which separated her bedroom from the kitchen, which also served as a breakfast room, waving the letter above her head.

"Oh, Auntie, what do you think? Guess what's happened! I'm so sorry, I didn't see you—good morning, Mr. Eversley," she said, all in a single breath, when she noticed Martin at the breakfast table.

"Good morning, Miss Daisy," Martin replied, schooling his voice to a respectful calmness.

But Daisy looked so fair and fresh as she stood

in the doorway, with her blue eyes sparkling, and her whole personality as radiant as the sunshine flooding the world out of doors ; how could he, a mere man, and a creature made for love, how could he help his pulses thumping like sledge-hammers and his whole heart crying out for that which it never could have ?

“ I don’t know what’s happened, but it must be something very nice, by the look of you,” smiled Miss Harland, as she lifted Martin’s egg out of the little saucepan on the kitchen range.

“ I’ve got a letter from Gerald, and he wants me to go on Saturday for a fortnight to Weatherly Towers—that’s the name of his family’s residence near London, he says—and I’m to drive into London in his car every day. Oh, Auntie, won’t it be just gorgeous !” and, because she was so happy, so brimming over with the rich, incomparable wine of youth, Daisy snatched up the kitten, a little sandy creature, and pressed a kiss on the top of its head.

She fell to discussing clothes with Miss Harland, who could not persuade her to eat a bite of breakfast before setting out for school, and all the time Martin sat looking moodily at his untouched egg, and in the general excitement his silence passed quite unnoticed.

But his thoughts were black and bitter in direct proportion to his silence, which was complete.

“ A motor to take her to London every day—to buy things for the wedding, I suppose. Goodness

knows I'd pour the wealth of the whole world at her feet if I could ; I'd give her palaces and pearls and diamonds and silks—I'd scale the stars and get her the moon if she wanted it, and if such a thing could be," he told himself, bitterly. " But I'm only a poor beggar who's got to pawn every article of value he possesses in order to pay for his illness, while he—"meaning Gerald Graham—" he's never done a single day's work in all his life, and he hasn't got it in him to make any girl a decent husband for long," he finished, contemptuously. He knew male human nature, inside out.

He was gone by the time that Daisy and her aunt had finished their all-important conversation about clothes, and neither of them guessed that his heart was one mighty ache, which was not lessened by the fact that he knew it was all so utterly useless. Martin Eversley was essentially a "one woman" man ; he was not, and never could be, of the swift, transient order of lover.

## CHAPTER X

**W**EATHERLY Towers had been the family residence of the Grahams for over five hundred years, and it was Mrs. Graham's strongest bulwark in a somewhat stormy, chequered life, that the old place still remained to them though it was mortgaged up to its full value. Since Gerald had come so strangely into the entire fortune of an old great-uncle whom he hardly knew, things had been so much brighter for them all. The two girls, Ailsa and Kitty, the latter just out of the schoolroom, seventeen years of age, and the prettiest, liveliest girl of her set, while Ailsa, tall, cold, and possessed of a statuesque handsomeness that required a great deal of dressing—both girls had been able to indulge in beautiful clothes since Gerald had had his windfall.

Mrs. Graham's chief passions in life were her son, and Weatherly Towers, which possessed so many relics of dead and gone Kings and Queens who had accepted the hospitality of its roof, so many legends and memories of former greatness.

Mrs. Graham seldom left the place ; she spent hours amongst the sometimes badly-executed oil paintings of the ancestors who belonged to herself as well as to her dead husband, for she had married



a cousin, and it was the secret ambition of her life to restore all the glories of the old place, to reign there as a kind of queen, and to entertain as royally as did her ancestors in the past.

But such an ambition required an almost illimitable supply of money, and Margaret Graham had but a solitary thousand a year of her own, while the two girls, Ailsa and Kitty, had about a hundred each, and Gerald only about three hundred of his own.

The rents from the cottagers and farms around Weatherly Towers paid the interest on the mortgage, and ever since he had come into his inheritance, Mrs. Graham had been pleading with her son to use half of it to free her beloved home, but so far without success.

"As long as the interest is paid, the old Jews who hold the mortgage won't care a twopenny toss," was his airy way of dismissing the matter.

Like most mothers of only sons, Margaret Graham had wonderful dreams for him, and the kind of wife that she some day wanted him to have, someone, of course, who would be worthy of her beloved home, which would belong to Gerald when she died, but so long as she lived it was hers to enjoy.

As usually happens when a perfect swan is visualised, a very ordinary goose transpired.

Gerald turned out to be a most disappointingly average young man, with very average tastes in the way of gaiety, which included a highly varied taste in the way of music hall stars and footlight ornaments.

"If Gerald brought one of those terrible girls home as his bride, I should either commit suicide or go mad," Mrs. Graham had declared, when she heard her son's name coupled with one or another of the said lively young women.

When Gerald's engagement to Julia Slade was announced, the harassed mother breathed a relieved sigh, for, though she had no great liking for the dark, dashing, beautiful Julia, still, she moved in his own set, and was not likely to drag the proud Graham traditions into the mire.

But the engagement was broken off directly a better chance presented itself to the astute Julia, and once again Margaret Graham was haunted by the spectre of an unsuitable marriage for her son.

"Who is she and what are her people?" had been her first enquiry with regard to Daisy, after she had listened patiently to a long eulogy on her beauty and charm of character.

"She's a little school teacher, and hasn't got any people—not any that she knows of, that is. She's been brought up by a most delightful old lady, who was also the village schoolmistress for years. That's all I know about Daisy, and all I want to know. She's the most wonderful girl I ever met in any city I've been in, and I've knocked around a bit," said Daisy's lover, emphatically.

"But don't forget that you have said the same thing about other girls, and then have altered your opinion," his mother reminded him, gently.

Gerald Graham made the usual philanderer's reply. "Oh, she's quite different."

"Anyhow," he went on, "I've asked a few people down—Julia insisted upon being asked with her husband—and I want Daisy to meet you and the girls. I hope you'll all be decent to her, but whether you are or not, I mean to marry her."

So Daisy, looking a perfect picture of lovely English girlhood, arrived at Weatherly Towers, and instead of the red-cheeked, awkward country girl that Gerald's mother had feared, she found a quiet, dignified, well-educated girl, who spoke on a variety of subjects far better than her own girls.

"If only we knew who she was, and if only she had even a little fortune of her own!" Mrs. Graham groaned to an audience of her bosom friends.

Kitty, warmhearted, impulsive, and lovable, had taken to Daisy at once. Ailsa, on the other hand, was very guarded and reserved, and more inclined to make a friend of Julia Milburn, whose inclusion in the house party was a great and unpleasant surprise to Daisy.

She was very gushing and sweet to the young girl, however, and outwardly at least, Daisy had no cause whatever for the faintest shadow of complaint.

She liked Jack Milburn also, and privately thought him far too good for his wife—an opinion which she was not alone in holding.

In some ways he reminded her of Martin Eversley; he was so boyishly clean and direct and fearless, as



well as possessed of a never ending patience with the whims and fancies of his wife.

Such a man would love with great, almost terrible, intensity, thought Daisy, but he would hate with equal force and be a fearsome enemy.

The truth of Daisy's estimate of Jack Milburn's character was to be proved in an incident which took place when Daisy had been at Weatherly Towers about a week.

She was resting in her room before dressing for dinner when a message was brought to her by a wide-eyed, frightened looking maid, who said that she was wanted at once in the billiard room.

Daisy hurried to the splendid billiard room which was in a wing of the great house that was seldom used, and immediately she entered, she became conscious of the tenseness of the atmosphere.

Her lover, with Julia Milburn by his side, was standing facing Jack Milburn, whose young face was white and his blue eyes blazing with anger.

Gerald Graham was also pale, but he was calm, at least, outwardly so, while Julia Milburn seemed to be too frightened for words to be possible.

Jack Milburn turned as Daisy opened the door, but he was not quick enough to intercept the earnest glances of mute appeal that were flashed upon her from her lover and his former sweetheart.

Daisy stood in the doorway, mutely bewildered, her blue eyes travelling from one to the other with an enquiring glance.

Jack Milburn was the first to speak, and his words



tumbled out, low, hot, with all the undisciplined anger of youth.

"I have just come back from a motor run through your little village, Miss Harland, and I stopped there to get more petrol. I overheard a conversation in the bar parlour of the local inn, and, ignorant of who I was, a certain incident which took place in Redwood Spinney was recounted. Julia's name and Graham's and yours were mentioned. I thrashed the fellow soundly, but I've got to have the matter out, here and now. Graham and my wife deny that it ever took place, but I've sent for you so that I could ask you before either of them get hold of you. Now, then, Miss Harland, I want the plain, simple truth. Did you, or did you not, detect Graham in the act of kissing my wife in Redwood Spinney on the day of Lady Pierman's garden party?"

Again two pairs of eyes—blue and deepest brown—telegraphed an anguished appeal to the young girl who stood facing them, slim, white, and seeming the very embodiment of purity and truth.

Impossible to mistake the meaning of the silent message; it was quite clear to Daisy that both her lover and Julia Milburn desired her to shield them with a lie.

It only lasted a few seconds, but those seconds seemed an eternity to the girl who was engaged in a silent struggle with herself, for, like most girls in love, a great deal of tender protectiveness, a fierce desire that no harm should befall her future mate,

was mixed with Daisy's regard for Gerald Graham.

But Daisy's childhood had been passed beneath the eye of a singularly fine, understanding woman, who had made the moulding of her little adopted child's character the chief study of her life, and her whole upbringing had imbued the young girl with a contemptuous hatred for lies, and a still greater scorn for a liar.

It was not her lover's face that Daisy saw when she made her decision ; a mental picture of Miss Harland, a vision of her gentle, though firm and scholarly face, was before her desperate blue eyes as she said, slowly and painfully, " I am afraid that you heard the truth, Mr. Milburn. But," she hastened to add, " I have forgiven Mr. Graham, and I have his word that the caress was given lightly, almost without thought, and it was, of course, received in the same way by Mrs. Milburn."

Daisy turned to Julia Milburn, whose dark, handsome face had gone chalk-white with mingled fright and rage. Fierce, implacable hatred looked out of her dark eyes, and if only the young girl could have foreseen what her adherence to the truth was to cost her—bitter tears, anguished days and nights when Death's voice would have been like that of a welcome friend—she would have tried even harder to soothe Jack Milburn, or it may be that Daisy would have thought a lie justified in such hideous circumstances.

" I knew the truth by your face, Miss Harland, but I wanted to hear it from your lips."

The words were hurled rather than spoken, into the miserable silence which had fallen on the group.

The young husband's face was white as marble, and his lips were like a thin red streak, so tightly were they compressed.

He turned to his wife, who, as yet, had spoken no word.

"Get upstairs," he said, pointing to the door, and the contemptuous order was like the lash of a whip, revealing the depths of his disgust ten thousand times better than a volley of reproaches and recriminations.

Julia Milburn pressed her hands upon the green baize of the billiard table, and she made one last attempt to deny the charge which had been so well proved.

"Why should you believe Miss Harland against me, your——" She was about to say "wife," but her husband checked her before the word fell from her lips.

"If you don't go up at once, I'll carry you up, and chance whether I meet servants or fellow-guests on the way," he said, coming towards the tall, handsome figure as he spoke.

Julia Milburn did not know her husband in this guise ; he was a stranger to her, and she had thought that she had plumbed his deepest depths !

With a final glance of hatred at Daisy, who stood, mute and miserable by her lover's side, she went out of the room, leaving her former lover to get out of the entanglement as best he might.

Jack Milburn turned to Daisy, and, doing his best to reduce his voice to some measure of calmness, said, "You'd better go, too, Miss Harland. This is a matter that I must settle with Mr. Graham alone."

Then, for the first time, Gerald Graham spoke.

"Really, my dear fellow, there's no need to be so melodramatic. I assure you that Miss Harland spoke truly when she said that the little caress which has been the cause of so much trouble was a most careless, light-hearted thing."

He got no further. With a sound which reminded Daisy of the snarl of an angry animal, the outraged young husband shot out his fist, and it caught, not Gerald Graham, but Daisy, for with a scream which pierced through the whole house, she flung herself in front of her lover and received the blow that was intended for him on her right shoulder.

She dropped at once, like a slaughtered sheep, and the unexpected turn which his quarrel had taken caused Jack Milburn to drop his fists, while sheer horror at the thought of even accidentally striking a girl caused the fire to die out of his face.

"You swine, you don't deserve that a girl like Miss Harland should waste even a breath on you, much less place her little body in front of your hide to save it," he said, as Gerald Graham stooped and raised his unconscious sweetheart's body in his arms.

Daisy's scream had brought the other guests, and the men servants, as well as Mrs. Graham and her two daughters to the billiard room, and they poured



in, one after another, all eager to know what was the matter.

"What has happened, Gerald? Is Miss Harland not well?" demanded Mrs. Graham, coming forward quickly when she saw Daisy lying upon the sofa.

"Er—she has fainted," replied Gerald Graham, his sub-conscious mind dreading the exposure which intuition told him was coming.

It came. With a glance of fury in his direction, Jack Milburn said, in a voice quite loud enough for guests and servants to hear, "Miss Harland has been knocked unconscious by a blow which was intended for your son. He'll tell you the story himself, perhaps, when I'm gone, but I think I've shown him that whatever love he likes to make to other married women, he can't do as he likes with my wife," and Jack Milburn flung himself out of the room, went straight upstairs and ordered his wife to be ready to leave in half-an-hour.

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE blow which had knocked Daisy unconscious had a far more serious result than either she or Gerald Graham had anticipated.

The doctor who was called in to examine the bruise which showed up with such cruel vividness on Daisy's white shoulder insisted that she went immediately to bed, and he gave instructions for a sleeping draught to be administered.

Mrs. Graham, by her cold, distant manner, seemed to hold Daisy responsible for the disgraceful scene in the billiard room, which resulted in the breaking-up of her house party.

Everybody made more or less banal excuses in order to cover their departure; several met in the village post office, all intent on the same errand, which was the sending of telegrams to various friends to request that another, urging them back to town, be sent at once to them at Weatherly Towers.

"The whole story will get round, with all kinds of additions, and we shall be cut by the people whose friendship we most value. Gerald, darling, why *did* you entangle yourself in this ridiculous manner? Why couldn't you have married Julia;

it is quite clear that you still care for her," said Mrs. Graham, plaintively, to her son, when, the last guest having departed, she sought and found him in the smoking room.

Gerald Graham turned on his mother with a savage look of annoyance on his face.

"I wouldn't marry Julia Milburn if every separate hair of her head hung with diamonds, and if she crawled on her knees to me! Heaven knows why I kissed her that day, but if ever a poor beggar has been made to suffer for a moment's folly, I have. I could kick that swell headed fool of a husband of hers from here to Halifax for hurting Daisy—and I will, too, some day," he added, fiercely.

"Well, you could hardly expect him to be pleased when he has hardly been married three months, and I might as well tell you here and now, Gerald, that I do not approve of Miss Harland for a future daughter-in-law, and Weatherly Towers is my home during my life-time. I shall be glad if you will kindly arrange to take her elsewhere, as soon as you can."

Mrs. Graham's voice trembled with anger; her eyes glinted like polished steel points; she was quite incapable of reasoned thought, or she would certainly not have risked losing the very substantial benefits which accrued to the girls and to herself through her son, for Gerald Graham, as evidenced by his treatment of Martin Eversley, was by no means close-fisted where

money was concerned. All his mother's most tender susceptibilities had been outraged; the only consciousness that she had was that of keen resentment at having been disgraced before her friends in the home of which she was so inordinately proud.

Her son looked at her keenly as he replied, deliberately, pausing to light a cigarette before he spoke. "I'm afraid, since the matter of my marriage is purely my own concern, that I do not mind whether my choice of a wife is or is not agreeable to you. Daisy Harland will become my wife the day after to-morrow by special license, and then I shall be only too delighted to take her from a house where she has been made to feel such an intruder. And I may tell you, mother, that you will certainly not gain anything by your attitude towards Daisy," concluded the angry lover.

Gerald Graham spoke confidently of his intention to marry his sweetheart within the next forty-eight hours, and his settlement of the financial aspect so far as his mother was concerned, was equally confident.

He had learned most of what life could teach him, but he had not grasped one highly important fact, which is, that nothing on earth, save love at its highest and best, is secure, that Fate may shuffle the cards of destiny and make the rich man poor, and the poor man rich, in a single hour, without any regard for individuals.

While Mrs. Graham was endeavouring to grasp



the meaning of her son's words, a knock came to the door, and a servant entered with a card.

"The gentleman is in the morning room, sir, and says that his business is most urgent and that he must see you at once," was the message which the servant delivered as Gerald Graham took the card.

"Mr. Stevens, representing Messrs. Brown and Waterford," he read out in a perplexed voice. "All right, tell him I'll be along in a few minutes," he said to the waiting servant.

Some dim foreboding of trouble caused him to fortify himself with a stiff whisky before he went to meet the lawyer who was awaiting him in the morning room whose walls had heard the secrets of so many dead and gone Grahams. It was as well that he had buoyed himself up, even with fictitious strength, to meet the blow which was to fall upon him.

Mr. Stevens made no show of sympathy, and came to the point at once. Like most people, he was acquainted (by hearsay) only with the worst side of Gerald Graham's character, and his voice was purely business-like as he said, "I am afraid that I am the bearer of bad news, Mr. Graham—very bad news."

He paused for a moment and his cold eyes took in the sudden paling of his listener's cheek with interest, but no emotion.

"Well?"

Gerald Graham rapped out the word, harshly,

insistently, as if his hearer were to blame for the news that he had brought.

Mr. Stevens cleared his throat before he spoke the second time.

"To come to the point, Mr. Graham, it seems that another will—a later one—has been found, which nullifies the one under which you inherited your great uncle's large fortune, and I am afraid that you do not benefit at all by the later will; you are not even mentioned."

Mr. Stevens' voice seemed like the droning of many bees in Gerald Graham's ears; he stared stupidly at him, and when he spoke it was without any conscious effort of his brain.

"Another will—a later one?" were the words that his dry lips framed rather than articulated.

The lawyer nodded.

"Yes, I am sorry to say that this is so, Mr. Graham. It seems that your great-uncle was always making fresh wills, cutting out his near relatives if they displeased him, and leaving his entire fortune to all kinds of distant relations whom he knew he possessed, but that was about all; he never saw them, nor they him.

"The last will is quite legal, and it now remains for you to give back the money which has never really been yours. I—er—I might add, that, if your expenditure since you have been in possession of this fortune does not exceed ten thousand pounds, our clients are agreed upon letting you have that sum as compensation for your disappointment."

Again the harsh, discordant laugh, indicative of nerves strained almost to breaking point, issued from Gerald Graham's lips.

"Ten thousand? Why, thirty thousand would not cover the amount that I have already spent of the rotten money," he said, unsteadily, his fingers plucking at the corners of his mouth in his agitation.

Mr. Stevens so far forgot himself as to make his lips into a little tube and gave a long, low whistle.

"Well, in that case, I expect you'll have to be indebted to the rightful heirs for the rest of the money over the ten thousand that they agreed to forego, according to their respective shares. It is private information, but I might tell you that there was a lot of wrangling before it was decided to allow you anything at all. You will be wanted in town to-morrow to meet my employers, who are calling a meeting of the people interested, in order to discuss the whole affair. In fact, I was told to inform you that your presence is urgently required at the meeting. I think that you already have our address on the card which I gave the maid," finished Mr. Stevens, in a perfectly calm collected voice, as if it were an every-day occurrence for him to inform rich young men that they have been living in a fool's paradise so far as their fortune is concerned.

"Yes, I shall come," said Gerald Graham, a trifle unsteadily, though he did his best to appear



unconcerned at the first hard blow that Fate had dealt him.

The incident concerning Julia Milburn and her husband faded into complete forgetfulness beneath the weight of the more recent blow ; even Daisy, lying bruised and sore upstairs in her bedroom, faded from his mind, and he quite forgot his passionate avowal to travel to town the next day in order to secure a special marriage license.

When the first dinner bell rang, Daisy attempted to get up and dress, but found that the pain in her shoulder would not allow her to move. So she lay back amongst the pillows, feeling very miserable and lonely—the whole world had gone wrong—or so it seemed—since that fateful afternoon in Redwood Spinney.

Thinking of the train of events which had followed brought a vivid picture of Martin Eversley to her mind. Bits of him came floating back to her—his big, broad shoulders, his deep blue kindly eyes, and the rolling cadence of his voice as it had sounded in her ears that night under the stars when her aunt had made her apologise to him.

“That’s what love does to a man, Daisy ; it makes him forget all things but the beloved!”

There was nobody in the room to see, but nevertheless, Daisy felt suddenly ashamed of the hot blush which crept over her cheeks, mounting up to her forehead, and even staining her neck a bright crimson.

The second gong went, and a housemaid brought up her dinner on a tray.



As soon as the girl's back was turned, Daisy searched the plates and dishes for a tiny note from her lover, or even, she thought dismally, he could have sent his love by a flower specially plucked for her out of the garden, for he had taught her the sweet language of the flowers, as conceived by lovers.

But there was nothing, nothing at all to assure the lonely, miserable little sweetheart that she was still beloved. True, Daisy was in ignorance of the mighty blow that had fallen upon her lover that afternoon.

Gerald Graham sent down a message that he would have his dinner in the smoking room by himself, and his mother and sisters, all three feeling somewhat sore at the events of the afternoon, did not press the point, nor try to persuade him to join them against his wish.

Afterwards, however, when coffee was brought in, Mrs. Graham, unable to bear the thought of finishing the meal without a sight of her best loved child, took his coffee in herself, and warm-hearted, dainty little Kitty slipped in after her. Ailsa went upstairs to her own room without a word.

Gerald Graham lifted his eyes as his mother and sister came into the room, and the misery in them deepened.

He noted his mother's proud, still handsome face, and thought how well she suited the rich brocaded dress that she had on.

Little Kitty, full of fire and fun and youthful

happiness, was such a pretty picture with her vivid little face, and dainty ways.

His money had made them all happy, but what would they do, how would they take it when they knew that it was all gone—that, as a plain matter of fact, he was in debt to the tune of twenty thousand pounds?

Mrs. Graham attributed the misery in her son's haggard face to quite a different cause, and, mother-like, she tried to console her idol with the assertion that he was making a mountain out of a molehill.

"We'll go to the south of France, or perhaps to Italy, and just wander about from place to place for a few months, and when we come back it will all have blown over," she said, coming over and putting an arm around her son's shoulder.

"Plenty have made a worse mucker than yours, Gerry. Buck up and come over to France and we'll have no end of fun," said Kitty, vivaciously.

Gerald Graham could stand it no longer. He forced his voice and manner to some sort of calmness, and said, looking away from the two pairs of eyes that were regarding him so curiously. "It's no good shirking it; you'll have to know to-morrow, so you might just as well know to-night."

"What—what has happened, my son?" asked Mrs. Graham, fearfully, her face losing some of its rich colour, while Kitty's smiles and dimples were wiped from her countenance as completely as a drawing on a slate is obliterated by a damp sponge.

"The will under which I inherited great-uncle

William's money has been annulled. He made a hobby of freak wills, so the lawyer chap said, and in the last one there is no mention of my name. The proper legatees agreed to allow me ten thousand, which I suppose was pretty decent of them, but I've spent over thirty thousand since I came into the cursed money, and I'm in debt to the tune of twenty thousand pounds. Now you've got all the facts, mother—all of them," repeated the stricken man, in a dull, colorless voice.

"You and the girls will have to draw in your horns a bit with regard to France for a holiday. It will be no good counting on me for a penny piece from now onwards," he added, gloomily.

Mrs. Graham's first words after the news were characteristic and showed to what a pitiable extent bricks and mortar and tradition can sometimes dominate an individual to the absolute exclusion of all kindly, human impulses.

Margaret Graham's thoughts and fears and sympathies were not for the living, who must suffer, but for the house in which they lived—Weatherly Towers, which had sheltered Grahams from early Norman times.

"Those horrible Jews who hold the mortgage will foreclose now, as soon as the story of your disinheritance becomes known. Oh, why did you not listen to me and pay off the mortgage while you had the money," she wailed, wringing her hands with despair.

Gerald Graham looked up sharply, and a queer,

hard antagonistic look came into his eyes, and his voice was harsh as he replied, bitterly, "It would be a jolly good thing if they did foreclose. This rotten house is all you think about. Even if I had redeemed it, you don't suppose you would have been allowed to retain it unencumbered, do you?"

"But, at least, it would have been re-mortgaged to the family, even though it is a distant branch! They would not have sold it over my head," retorted his mother.

Her voice suddenly died away, like the last sob of a tired child who has cried itself to sleep, and her tall, graceful figure fell forwards and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Ring the bell for some brandy and water," said Gerald Graham to his sister.



## CHAPTER XII

**D**AISY had passed a restless night; not once or twice, but a dozen times she had awakened, her heart beating fast with rapture, for she had dreamed that she was walking in a scented garden, her hand held fast by her lover, while every now and then he would stop in some flower-screened arbour and pull her to him with gentle roughness—if such a term can be understood—that she so dearly loved, and press sweet, wild kisses upon her lips, and in her ears there sounded the tender little nonsense phrases that lovers have used from the beginning of things.

Then, when consciousness returned, and she found herself in bed instead of in a rose filled garden, Daisy's eyes filled with tears, and they spilled over her fresh young cheeks like rain, for nothing is so tragic as youth when it grieves.

"Not a line, nor even an enquiry sent up by a servant!" she said indignantly, and then, later on, her longing for her lover was replaced by a longing which was even more powerful and insistent, though of this Daisy, in her youthful ignorance, was unaware. She began to want her aunt's kindly, gracious, serene presence, and the

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atmosphere of the little cottage which possessed in such rich measure that which was lacking in this great, wonderful mansion—the quality of homeliness and sweet, untrammelled peace.

When the maid brought up her breakfast on a tray, and looked her honest sympathy at the little tear-stained face, Daisy ventured to ask. “Did Mr. Graham give you a message for me?”

The girl shook her head.

“I haven’t seen him this morning, Miss, but I did hear one of the menservants say that the young master was going up to town early. He—”

It looked for a moment as if the girl had meant to add something more, but she shut her mouth suddenly, with a decisive snap, and Daisy was too heartbroken at her lover’s apparent neglect to bring herself to ask any more questions.

She made a miserable pretence at eating her breakfast—a crumb of the roll seemed to choke her, while the small sip of tea which she took had no more flavour than hot water—but suddenly it occurred to her that the girl had looked rather strange, as if she might be keeping back something, and the idea grew as such ideas will, until she imagined all kinds of terrible things in connection with her lover.

“I must get up and go downstairs. I must—I must!” Daisy kept repeating to herself, in order to stifle the pain which the moving of her bruised shoulder caused her.

It was very painful indeed, for the heavy punch,

delivered with the passionate force of a husband who considers himself wronged, had bruised the bone as well as the flesh; nevertheless, Daisy managed to dress herself, and she was almost ready to go downstairs when a tap came to the door, and Mrs. Graham entered, followed by the doctor.

Even as she started with surprise, and wrenched her shoulder with a nervous incautious movement, Daisy was obliged to notice the terrible change that one day and night had wrought in her hostess.

Mrs. Graham's cheeks seemed to have sunken into hollows, and her usually somewhat hard, but brilliant eyes looked as if all the colour had been washed out of them by days and nights of ceaseless weeping.

Daisy sensed tragedy immediately, and her mind could only formulate one theory—that something had happened to Gerald.

"What is the matter? You are all keeping something from me! Oh, please, please tell me; has anything happened to Gerald?"

Daisy's voice broke on the last word.

The doctor, with a meaning glance at Mrs. Graham, said in a soothing voice, "Don't be a silly, fanciful girl, Miss Harland. There is nothing wrong with Mr. Gerald, but there will be something seriously wrong with his sweetheart if she does not undress instantly and go back to bed."

He ordered Mrs. Graham to assist Daisy back to bed, and when he had dressed and examined

the injured shoulder he warned her that she was not to get up until he called the following morning at the same hour.

Daisy was looking like a very tired, ill child when, half an hour later, Mrs Graham again entered her bedroom.

There was something in the pathetic droop of her shoulders as she turned her back for a moment in order to close the door that awakened all Daisy's generous, youthful pity as she looked, and she cried, involuntarily, "Mrs. Graham, I know that you don't like me, that you do not consider me good enough for your son, but then, no woman could be—he is so fine and splendid," unconsciously feeding the flame of her hearer's devotion to her son.

At any other time, Mrs. Graham would have coldly, proudly agreed that Gerald was a fit mate even for a Princess, but the expression of Daisy's love for him only irked her now, and rendered doubly unpleasant the task that she had set herself.

"Cannot you tell me what the trouble is, and if—oh, it would be the proudest day of my life if I could do anything to help Gerald and you."

Daisy spoke from her heart; her reason might have told her that there was nothing which she, a penniless girl without influence, could do to help anybody such as Gerald Graham and his mother.

Mrs. Graham's words, when they came, galvanised the little invalid into hot, passionate resentment.

"There *is* something that you can do, Daisy, that indeed, can only be done by you, and you will



be averting a terrible calamity if only you will consent," said Gerald Graham's unhappy mother, coming to Daisy's bedside, and taking one of the cold, limp little hands into her own hot, feverish clasp.

"Tell me what it is," said Daisy, fervently, feeling that there was nothing on earth which she would not do, no sacrifice which she would not make for the lover who, now that some unknown danger threatened him, was instantly forgiven his offences.

But the hot, angry blood mounted to her white forehead when Mrs. Graham, still holding tightly to her hand, as if the feel of it gave her strength to proceed, said "Will you give up my son, tell him that you no longer wish to be his wife. He is ruined, and our home—this beloved home which has cradled and nurtured his ancestors for hundreds of years, has got to pass into the hands of rich, vulgar Jews, who will probably modernise it and turn it into a private hotel, or some horrible, monstrous thing. If Gerald is freed from this engagement, there is a rich woman, young, beautiful, and in his own set, who would marry him tomorrow, heedless of everything. Oh, girl, you must consent, you must, I tell you! You would not deliberately ruin my son, would you? Would you?"

The distracted woman's voice rose to a shrill screaming note as she fell on her knees by Daisy's bed.

Strangely enough, Daisy did not cower nor shrink with fear from the wildly beseeching woman who knelt at her bedside, pouring out so hotly and uninterruptedly what seemed to her the very best reasons why Daisy's love-story should be trampled upon and crushed into the dust.

"It all depends upon you—absolutely upon you," she wailed once more.

Daisy's eyes glowed like two blue lamps, and the colour in her cheeks rivalled that of pink blush roses, but she was strangely quiet, for within herself big, virile and, to her inexperience, terrifying, forces were at work, thrilling and exciting her to such an extent that fear was utterly routed.

Mrs. Graham relaxed her hold on the tiny hand when it suddenly dawned upon her that she was being kept waiting for her answer.

"Why don't you speak, Daisy?" she asked, a little of her old imperiousness re-asserting itself in her voice and manner.

Something in the tone set a spark to the fury which, for the first time in her quiet life, was raging through Daisy with the wild force of a tropical cyclone. She sat up in bed.

"You want me to speak?" she said in a loud, clear voice, which somehow seemed to have shed some of its youth, "I will then." Her tone was hard. "I think that your calm proposal to wreck my happiness is perfectly monstrous, Mrs. Graham; why should I or your son be sacrificed to a house, merely because your ancestors lived in it?" The

girlish voice trembled, and it was easy to see that Daisy's temper was at white heat.

"Would you have sacrificed your life's happiness for the sake of the people who have been dead hundreds of years, who probably would be the last to expect or even appreciate such an action?" she went on breathlessly.

"I married my cousin for family reasons; I did not love him," confessed the white-faced elder woman, in a dull, colourless voice.

"But I do love Gerald, and he loves me, and I would like to hear what he has got to say to your proposition," said Daisy, warmly.

For the first time an expression of emotion crossed Mrs. Graham's face, and it was that of fear.

She had certainly not expected the quiet little country girl to oppose her wishes so vehemently, but then, most of Margaret Graham's life had been spent in re-living the past; she had absolutely no grasp of the psychology of youth, with its warm, living, palpitating passions.

"You will not, of course, tell Gerald that I have approached you on such a matter. I—er—I beg that you will do no such thing."

It was distinctly hard for Mrs. Graham to ask a favour from the girl to whom she had been barely polite, and who was not indebted to her for even the smallest courtesy.

Daisy inclined her little golden head graciously, and her frank eyes met those of the older woman

with an expression of regret, almost of apology, in their clear depths.

"Mrs. Graham, don't take Gerald's financial ruin so much to heart. He is young and strong, and his money was causing him to allow his splendid brain to run to seed. He'll have to work now, and it will be the best thing in the world for him. I—I'll stand by him and help him all I can," she said.

Daisy was looking on the bright side with the optimism of her shining youth.

Mrs. Graham stared at the young face with hard, unappreciative eyes.

"How can you help him?" she said, with a slight, but very effective, accent on the pronoun.

"I hope that I can rely on your honour not to make further trouble between us," she remarked, over her shoulder, as she left Daisy's room.



## CHAPTER XIII

**A** WOMAN'S love is like the creeping vine ; it withers if it has nothing to embrace. If Gerald Graham had thrown Daisy over on the score that he did not wish to bind her to a definite engagement now that his material prosperity had vanished, she would probably have grieved deeply for a time, and then in a few months, or possibly a year, have wondered why she had ever confused such raw, youthful emotion with the greatest passion that life holds.

But, though her lover made it perfectly clear that they could not hope to be married until he could afford such expensive luxuries as a wife and a home, he did not offer to release her from the engagement.

"Darling, you wouldn't like me to give you back this?" Daisy asked, in a low, tear-choked voice, when they were alone together, the first day that the doctor had allowed her to get up.

She touched the beautiful half hoop of diamonds that glittered on her slim left hand.

"No, that I would not—that is, not unless you yourself wish it," was Gerald Graham's emphatic reply. In the chaotic whirl of adverse circumstances which at present involved him, amidst the coldness

of friends unworthy of the sacred name, and even the disapproval of his own family, who thought that he ought to make advances to the rich girl who was still willing to throw herself at his head, Daisy alone seemed staunch, and sweet, and true.

There was no hint of coldness in her voice or manner, and her sunny optimism was a bulwark of whatever faith he still possessed. But it was as a sheet anchor, to which he clung, in order to gain moral support, that he thought of Daisy rather than as the girl with whom he was madly in love.

"Oh, I'll wait for ever, until I am an old woman, if needs be, but I'll never marry anybody but you, darling. You'll get on and make good, and be a rich man before you realise it, Gerald. I'll go back to school and we'll meet in the holidays, and roam about the fields together, and you'll tell me all that you have been doing. And we'll write to each other every day," declared Daisy, fervently.

Her lover's ring still adorned her left hand when she returned to Lynton, and she had learned, in a roundabout fashion, that Mrs. Graham had succeeded in getting a stay of the foreclosure of the mortgage on her beloved home for three months, by almost going down on her knees to those who held it.

Where or how she hoped to obtain the huge sum that would be necessary to save Weatherly Towers nobody knew, and in the urgency of

obtaining a position whereby he might at least earn his bread and butter, Gerald Graham certainly did not care.

It was clearly not of her lover that Daisy Harland was thinking as she sat back in an empty third class carriage going back to Lynton, for her blue eyes were clouded and her whole face expressed the most extreme anxiety.

The cause of it was a letter which she pulled out of her handbag, and read for the hundredth time since it had been received that morning.

It was in a curiously crabbed hand, as if the writer found some difficulty in handling so small an article as a pen. It was from Martin Eversley, and it was characteristically brief, but very much to the point. It was written from the cottage.

"He's still there, then," had been Daisy's first thought on opening the letter.

"Dear Miss Harland," she read. "Your aunt has dared anybody to write and interrupt your holiday, and nobody has so far had the pluck to do so.

"But I think that you ought to know that Miss Harland is ill, and needs, not neighbours, however good and kind, not the parson who sometimes comes and reads all the afternoon when she is mad with pain, nor even the doctor, with his endless bottles of coloured water.

"It's you that she's fretting after, only she won't say so, and if you'll interrupt your holiday even for a few days, the sight of you would do much to cheer her up.

"I am staying on at her urgent wish, because she says she feels safer with a man in the house.

Hoping you are well,

Yours sincerely,

Martin Eversley."

Daisy experienced a thrill of gratitude to the man whose friendship she certainly desired and appreciated, even if she did not want his love, and she groaned once or twice because the train seemed to stop at all sorts of unnecessary stations simply to delay her, as it seemed.

But Lynton was reached at last, and the first person that Daisy saw, striding impatiently up and down the tiny platform, looking like some magnificent forest animal who has been caught and caged, was Martin Eversley, evidently on the look out for her.

He came running down to meet her as she stepped out of the carriage, and somehow, for no reason that would bear analysis, some of the gold returned to the day and her fearful little heart knew some peace when she felt her hand enclosed in that big, friendly grip, and saw his white teeth flash in a smile of welcome.

"It's good to see you back, Miss Harland. Had a good time?" Martin Eversley asked, in the same tone that he had used ten minutes before in greeting the station master.

"Yes, thank you," answered Daisy, simply, as she gave her little suitcase into his hands, and told the station master to send up the big box later on.



But she felt herself crimson beneath the rapier-keen glance which Martin Eversley flashed at her white, serious little face, and some inner consciousness told her, as plainly as if the thing had been expressed in words, that this strong man at her side had divined her unhappiness and knew that she had told a polite lie when she had asserted that she had had a good time.

"Aunt Mary is ill, Mr. Eversley. Tell me all that you know—every single thing," cried Daisy, as they turned their steps towards the cottage.

A strange look came into Martin Eversley's clear grey eyes; if one could have connected the emotion of fear with such an absolutely fearless personality, one would have said that Martin Eversley was desperately afraid of something or somebody. And he was; but the fear was not for himself, it was for the little soft, gold and white girl who walked by his side, the girl whom he would have given all his hot, worshipping soul to have called "sweetheart."

"She'll be alone, even if she marries Graham, if Miss Harland dies; perhaps she'll be even more alone if she marries him, for he isn't the sort to let any grief which does not directly concern himself claim his sympathy for long. It isn't his fault, for he can't help it. It's just that he is made that way. He loves the whole world of women, not one particular woman."

Little flashes of intuitive thought such as these—they were really the correct estimations of character

which were some day to make the name of Martin Eversley famous throughout three continents—kept troubling Daisy's escort.

He knew quite well that the visit to Weatherly Towers had been a failure, so far as the young girl's enjoyment had been concerned, and it sent the hot, angry blood surging in great red red waves to his temples as he thought that possibly the Graham women had acted like snobs and made Daisy feel her poverty and lack of relatives to answer for her breeding.

And he—he would worship her all his days, he would enthrone her in his heart as his queen so that no other woman should dispute her right to reign there, but the shrine without an inmate is a cold thing to worship, and friendship is a beggar's portion at the feast of love.

"Oh, here is the doctor. Do you mind if I ask him to give us a lift as far as the cottage, Mr. Eversley? Perhaps he is on his way to auntie's now," said Daisy, as a little trap, driven by the local doctor, came smartly down the road.

"I'll not go back just yet, I've got to call at the post office. The nurse is with Miss Harland, and I daresay that you are right about Dr. Conway. It is just his time for visiting your aunt," said Martin.

"Very well, I expect I shall see you later on at home," said Daisy, as Martin Eversley helped her into the doctor's trap which had stopped, lifted his hat, and walked rapidly away.

"Doctor, is there anything seriously wrong with auntie? I was just going to get your report from Mr. Eversley when your trap came in sight."

Daisy spoke in quick, jerky tones which would have betrayed her fears even if her white face and piteous eyes had not done so. All thought of the trouble that she had been called upon to bear in the last few days was sunk in this worst of all trouble that now faced her.

Nobody but themselves knew how strong and deep was the tie between Miss Harland and her adopted child. Dr. Conway answered Daisy's question by asking another. "You are engaged to be married to a rich man, are you not, Miss Daisy?" he said abruptly.

Perhaps he saw Daisy's beautiful eyebrows arch themselves just a shade, for, without waiting for an answer, he went on quickly, "I am not asking out of idle curiosity, but I believe that you are genuinely fond of your adopted aunt; isn't that so?"

"Oh, what are you keeping from me? Why don't you tell me at once, without torturing me like this!" and Daisy's sharp voice betrayed the fact that her nerves were raw and on edge.

Dr. Conway privately decided that she should have a sleeping draught when she got home.

"Well, to be quite frank with you, Miss Daisy, there is only one thing which can save your aunt's life, and that is money—sufficient money to take her to Egypt and keep her there for at least a year,"

Daisy went white to the lips. The blue sky, the green fields, the joyously singing birds—all seemed to blend into a hideously mocking chorus.

“Egypt? A year?” The young girl repeated the words blankly, as if she hardly took in their purport.

“Yes, people can live almost indefinitely on even half a lung in Egypt, and Miss Harland has a whole lung, but it won’t be whole by the middle of the winter if she has to go through the damp fogs and rains which we shall presently get,” said Dr. Conway, in a serious, earnest voice.

“Then it’s consumption?” Daisy breathed the dread word through pallid, ice-cold lips, and her heart felt frozen within her.

“Yes, but Miss Harland might be patched up for a good number of years, in fact till she reaches the allotted span, if she can get away in time. She has no money of her own, she tells me,” went on the doctor, as they turned into the lane which led to the little cottage.

“I haven’t suggested Egypt yet; I was waiting to see you, for no doubt if you explained matters to your future husband, he would let you have a couple of hundred pounds, which would give her a good start, anyway.”

Daisy closed her eyes because of the sudden pain which contracted her heart; her brain reeled and her lips parted over her white teeth in a strange fashion, which made her look as if she was smiling,



and yet at the same time, as if she might be just about to cry.

She thought of silly, idle, fashionable women, like Julia Milburn and her set, who would spend the sum that represented life or death to her aunt on a dog banquet, or some other such wicked device to fritter away time, and she made up her mind to write to Gerald that very afternoon, a long letter begging him, if he loved her at all, to somehow get two hundred pounds for her, even if he had to borrow it, a few pounds here and there, amongst his friends.

"Yes, I will ask Mr. Graham, Doctor. I will write this afternoon," said Daisy, as the trap drew up outside the cottage.

## CHAPTER XIV

MARTIN Eversley came in from his early walk across the dew-drenched fields.

The sound of low, heartbroken sobs came to his ears. "Miss Daisy's in there." The little maid who came in by the door pointed a rough red finger in the direction of the parlour.

"Miss Harland's not—not—" Martin Eversley could not bring himself to utter the thought that sprang immediately to his mind. The little country maid shook her head.

"No, she told me she'd 'ad a better night when I took up a cup o' tea. I think," the cautious voice sank lower, "I think it's on account of what the postman's brought, just now. There was only one letter," finished the young servant.

One stride across the tiny passage that could hardly be called a hall took Martin into the chintz and silver sitting room which would always be haunted with memories for him, for here he had first seen Daisy, here he had fought for her, and here now he saw her, in the stricken hopeless attitude of one utterly abandoned to grief.

"Daisy," he said, softly, but she did not hear.

The morning gold lay on her hair, and spilled

itself with prodigal generosity over her neck and bowed, slender shoulders.

The tiny, feathery, gold curls that lay in the nape of her milk-white neck made him long to catch the little figure up in his great strong arms, and strain her to himself, and whisper all the magic love-words that always rise unbidden, and previously unknown, to the lips of lovers.

“ Oh ! ”

It was only a single word, moaned rather than spoken, but it roused all the tenderness and chivalry of Martin Eversley's ardent nature.

He was across the room with two steps, and the next instant his arms would have been round her, for she was very weak, worn out and helpless with late nights, sorrow, and nervous strain, and he was very strong. Only last night she had called him “ friend,” but he wanted to be her lover, her chosen lover, and if ever she came to him, it would have to be of her own free will. He would never take by force what other men won.

But it is doubtful if the older, more primitive force of love would not have triumphed over the ideas which were the outcome of civilisation, if Daisy had not at that moment raised her eyes, swimming with tears, and at the same moment held out her hand.

It was an appeal to his manhood, a sign that she trusted him ; and all that was fine and fundamentally good in Martin Eversley rose up to answer the call.



"What is it, Miss Harland?" he said, and, strong man that he was, something choked his voice as he spoke.

Daisy held out a letter, containing few love words, seeing that it had come from the pen of a lover.

"It's quite impossible for me to borrow two hundred pounds for you, Daisy, much as I would like to help you. Perhaps you do not quite realise my predicament. I am in debt to my great-uncle's heirs to the extent of twenty thousand pounds, and my mother's income is in the form of an annuity, and she can hardly make ends meet as it is.

"Don't you believe the old johnny who says that consumption can only be cured in those expensive places abroad. They have splendid sanatoria in England now, and I've known people who have come out perfectly cured in a few months. You apply to the local Board of Guardians for forms to fill up. I am not very well at present."

A short paragraph describing his own physical state followed the callous dismissal of Daisy's urgent plea, and Martin Eversley did not trouble to read that.

He stood stock still, like a splendid statue, and the strength of the emotion that was consuming him like fire caused the colour to ebb away from his cheeks, which had, thanks to Miss Harland's nursing, now regained the ruddy glow of health. He was thinking and planning with the desperate eagerness of despair.



He could not say to Daisy what he thought of his former master ; it was not his code to run a man down behind his back, even if his tongue had not been tied by the fact that the writer of the letter was Daisy's future husband.

He bent down and ventured to place his brown hand on the slim, girlish shoulder.

Daisy's blue eyes seemed to draw the very heart out of him. His voice was the tenderest, kindest, most comforting thing in the world to listen to as he said,

"I suppose all that Mr. Graham says is true. But now, Miss Harland, I'm going to ask you something ; it is a plain question and it wants a plain answer."

A wondering expression crept into Daisy's eyes. "Yes?" she said, in a questioning voice.

"Would you take the money if I got it for you, somehow or another?" asked Martin Eversley, eagerly, his whole soul in his eyes.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid that I shouldn't get it honestly. I hope I'll never do anything to forfeit the respect of the dear woman upstairs, and yourself, Miss Harland," he added.

There was a little sob in Daisy's voice as she said, "I would take the money from my worst enemy, so I am quite sure I would not refuse it from you, Mr. Eversley. But—but it is a big sum, two hundred pounds. How do you propose to get it?"

Martin got up and opened the little writing

bureau, and brought forth a huge armful of manuscripts, mostly typewritten, and seemingly all ready to be sent out to editors.

"You see those?" said Martin, handling them carefully, proudly, as if they were living things.

"Yes," said Daisy, although, when she had seen them, her hopes had sunk, for her aunt had told her and she had often read how very much a matter of chance was the sale of even world-famed masterpieces. And there seemed so little in that bundle of typewritten paper to represent a whole two hundred pounds!

But Martin was happily, supremely confident of himself; so far, his time had been occupied with producing, and not at all with selling.

"When I started to write my book—the big book that is only half finished as yet—I realised that it would have to be done slowly, and that there would come times when I would not be able to touch it; so as not to be idle, I wrote a number of short stories and articles, and Mr. Green, the teacher that Mr. Graham had for me at first, told me not to sell them if I could possibly help it, but to keep them until the book came out, and if it was successful, I would be able to get three times as much for them.

"Well, the need has arisen, and I am going to send them out this very day," and Martin's voice, so purposeful and confident, gave Daisy hope, even against her better judgment.

The visits of the postman became events which

tore Daisy's nerves to shreds, between alternating hope and despair.

The big envelopes, which held Martin's manuscripts, were looked at with tragic eyes, as they came back, time after time, with the precision of boomerangs.

"We like this story, but we have a lot of material already in hand; therefore, we regretfully return your contribution."

This was the most hopeful letter that Martin received; all the rest were accompanied by formal rejection slips.

"I can't make it out! I'm not a vain fool, because I've had all that knocked out of me, long ago, but I know that my stuff is as good—ay, and although I say it—I know it's better than the milk and water muck that gets into print month after month by men and women who don't in the least know what they are talking about.

"Why, I read an article on Japan that made me sick, it was so false and absurd, but when I sent the real thing along it came back like a shot, with the editor's regrets. But I'll get there yet!" Martin cried, pacing the little parlour, and his fine eyes glowed with the force within him. "I'll get to the top if I have to hack my way inch by inch!"

If Daisy had spoken the thought that was uppermost in her mind, she would have said, "I know that you will eventually reach the goal of your ambitions simply because nobody will be strong enough to stop you; but, meanwhile, poor auntie

lies upstairs, so white and ill that she looks as if a strong breeze would blow her away, and perhaps it will be too late to save her, when success comes."

The presence of Martin in the house seemed to bring some comfort to Miss Harland.

Strangely enough, she was not nearly so perturbed as Daisy thought that she would be when she heard the news of Gerald Graham's misfortune. She made very few enquiries after him, and listened quietly to the news which Daisy gave her when letters from her lover arrived.

Three weeks passed, and the leaves were beginning to show the red and gold tints of autumn. Daisy shivered each time that she heard the dry, husky cough which lessened her aunt's chances of recovery every time that it shook her feeble frame.

She was so alone, so helpless; the only one who might have helped her could not do so, and Martin, though he was straining every nerve and sinew, sitting up till dawn, night after night, desperately writing topical articles in the hope that the newspapers would accept and pay for them, was just as helpless as she.

And even his moral support would soon have to be withdrawn. That morning he had said to her, "I'm sorry to have to tell you, Miss Harland, that after this month I'll have to clear out of Lynton."

"Why?" asked Daisy, who wondered what she would do without Martin, who, steady as a rock, had become a sort of permanent influence



in her life. The big fellow, tanned by the sun, and salt Devon winds, looked disconsolate and sad.

"It's no good going on wasting money sending out stuff that nobody seems to want." He pointed to a pile of envelopes on the table, all filled with his efforts. "I've got to find work of another sort, and bury my dreams for a spell. I've got enough to pay my bill here for another month, and after that I'll have to clear out."

He did not mention the little lady lying upstairs though Daisy knew that she was for ever in his mind and she knew, too, the depth of his disappointment and grief at being unable to give her the chance of life.

"I—I shall miss you," said Daisy, simply, and sadly, and Martin hugged the words to himself throughout the whole of that golden autumn day, and somehow the cloud of depression did not weigh upon him nearly so heavily as usual when he tramped to the newsagents to get the latest news.

Daisy wondered what had happened when, the next day, she saw Martin, attired only in a suit of short pants and a thick sweater, come in from a cross country run, and then repair at once to the bathroom, where he remained for a long time.

Sometimes, in the days that followed, he disappeared for hours at a time, and he never gave any account of himself.

He was just as kind, just as thoughtful as ever, but he no longer shut himself up for hours in the little chintz parlour, writing. Instead, he seemed

to revel in being out of doors, and certainly at the end of a fortnight he was a magnificent specimen of perfectly healthy manhood. His whole being simply radiated health and strength, and Daisy felt the most forsaken girl on earth on the morning that he went away—and that although a letter from her lover was lying in her lap!

It was incredible how much she missed the sunny, kindly personality. Her aunt, too, did not seem nearly so well now that he had gone from the house, though she told herself, very sensibly, that Martin Eversley was not the man to eat bread for which he could not pay.

Then came the wonderful day which was written in letters of gold on Daisy's heart for the rest of her life. The postman delivered a little parcel, carefully sealed and registered, addressed to herself, and when she opened it, twenty-five crisp, ten-pound notes fluttered to the floor.

A mist swam before Daisy's eyes, and she subsided on to the hearthrug, a weak, unnerved little mass of quivering sensibilities. Her first glad thought was that Gerald had somehow managed to obtain the money; but amongst the notes was a letter which soon dispelled this thought.

The money came from Martin Eversley!

A queer, altogether unaccountable thrill pulsed through the young girl, sitting on the floor in a pool of golden sunshine; but after a second, the wonderful glow faded, leaving in its place a half-defined sense of shame—shame because it was not

the man who was to be her husband who had succeeded in supplying her urgent need!

Daisy tried to console herself with the reflection "Well, anyhow, the money's here, and poor Auntie will be able to go."

There was not much in the letter, which bearing a South London address, said simply, "Dear Miss Harland, I have succeeded in getting the money you wanted, and fifty pounds over, which will do to get some little extra comforts for your aunt on the voyage out."

"A line to this address will find me, and if you let me know when your aunt is starting, I will come down and accompany her to the ship and put in a word to the right people for her."

There followed a flash of the bright, ready-witted Martin that Daisy had come to know so well.

"Trust an old sailor for knowing the right people on a boat!"

He was hers very sincerely, and Daisy folded up the neatly written letter, and took it, along with the banknotes, upstairs to her aunt.

The kindly little lady was wasted almost to a shadow, but she smiled bravely when she saw Daisy, looking as bright and fresh as the morning itself, come tripping into the room, a mysterious smile on her lips and her hands clasped tightly behind her back.

"Oh, Auntie, what do you think has happened?" Daisy burst out, directly she closed the bedroom door. Then, unable to keep the secret any longer,

she flung the crisp bank-notes on the bed, saying, "The money for Egypt, auntie, and fifty pounds over! Guess who sent it, dear! Ah, but you never will, not in a dozen years, so I'd better tell you."

But before Daisy's lips could frame Martin's name, the frail little lady on the bed looked up with a smile that was almost unearthly in its radiance, and replied, softly, "It won't take me a dozen years to guess, dear child. It won't take a dozen seconds. Martin Eversley sent it, did he not?"

"Yes," replied Daisy, somewhat curtly, if the truth be told. Once again she felt a little tug of jealousy at her heart that her aunt should show Martin so much favour, while her own lover, the man who was to become her husband, was hardly ever mentioned.

There was a curious little choke in Daisy's voice as she said, "Auntie, Gerald did try to get the money for us; but,—but, you see, he—"

"I understand, darling. It is not given to all men to conquer where they will, as it has been given to Martin," was Miss Harland's gentle, but extremely disconcerting reply.



## CHAPTER XV.

**W**HAT—why—what does this mean, Martin? ” The Christian name slipped out unawares ; all Martin’s eager manhood rejoiced at the slip. These little evidences of liking on Daisy’s part were only crumbs, it was true—and he could have easily swallowed the whole loaf!—but they were better than nothing at all.

Martin put out his hand, and thrilled to the touch of Daisy’s soft palm—cool and fragrant as a rose petal.

“ I thought that you were in London, and—oh, what have you been doing? Just look at your face ! ”

Daisy turned her shocked and disgusted eyes away.

True, Martin Eversley’s face was not exactly fit for a portrait study at that moment.

His lower lip was swollen with a deep cut upon it, one eye was temporarily closed, and two pieces of plaster covered cuts upon either cheek.

“ I didn’t expect to see you, Miss Daisy ; I was taking this short cut through the fields to avoid the public path. I’m bound for the Cobbler’s Arms. ”

“ Have you been fighting ? ”

Daisy asked the question primly, reproachfully, much as a mother asks the same silly question of

her small boy, when he has obviously been engaged in a rough-and-tumble.

"Yes."

The word was jerked out, like a shot from a boy's pea-shooter.

"Fighting is brutal, horrible, soul-sickening."

Daisy paused, not having enough adjectives at her command to adequately express her feelings. If she had been brought up with a family, instead of with one gentle, delightful spinster, the sight of a man's countenance a little marred by contact with another man's fists might not have shocked her so much. As it was, she felt revolted at the sight before her.

As Martin gazed at her and listened, his senses delighting in the sweet, charming picture that Daisy made, he felt himself grow hot all over. The pressure of her little hand had been a wild delight, and he longed to experience it over again. His gaze wandered hungrily to her lips, and he found himself yearning and speculating on the delirious joy of just one kiss from them.

Somewhere, in his reading, he had chanced upon the line, "God's own mad lover dying on a kiss," and he thought of himself as the mad lover, but he did not want to die upon a kiss, however wonderful, however exquisite.

He wanted to live—live—live! Never had the call of Life been so strong, never had the urge to conquer been so great.

He looked upon the postponement of Daisy's

marriage as a direct intervention of Fate to save her from a man who was not worth the tip of her smallest finger.

He was not going behind his former employer's back—oh, no! he would play the game with clean hands, or not at all—but he was going to make it his business to keep near Daisy, to be a sort of watchdog over her, while her aunt was away, and if ever it chanced that Gerald Graham set her free—well, then, he'd have another try for that happiness which is the salt of life for all men worthy of the name, without which all striving seems vain, and effort futile.

He had not meant that Daisy should see him with his face in that condition; but he had been unable to stop away.

He had meant to swear the landlord of the Cobbler's Arms to secrecy regarding his coming, until his face had resumed its normal appearance.

Daisy had passed from a state of revulsion to a very natural and feminine curiosity.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

"If I hadn't this face on me, Miss Daisy, something else wouldn't have happened,—I mean the little parcel that I sent from London the day before yesterday," he finished, dryly.

It was Daisy's turn to blush pink, and the tears actually came into her eyes when she realised that, so far, she had not mentioned the wonderful surprise that she had received two days ago.

"What must you think of me, Martin? And

I've been singing for joy ever since it came ! But it was seeing your face like that—and the unexpectedness of meeting you, and everything. Was it a prize fight, then, and did you win ?" she asked, coming a step nearer, and looking at the wounds with different eyes—eyes which lost sight of the brutality of the conflict, and saw only the indomitable courage and wonderful resource of the man who will not be beaten, who will be ready with a thousand other methods if one fail.

She raised her timid girl's eyes, full of admiration, to the strong, eager face above her ; it was essentially a man's face that she saw, a face of steel, tense and immobile ; a mouth of steel, but with tender curves that knew laughter and the sweet nonsense that rises, unbidden, and previously unknown, to a lover's lips, and eyes that, too, had the glint and glitter of steel, but laughter lay in their depths to temper the hardness.

And, though she was vaguely frightened, Daisy was stirred with pride in him. His masculinity, the masculinity of the strong, fighting male, made its inevitable appeal to her, all the more because she herself was so softly, sweetly feminine.

" Tell me all about it," she urged, falling into step beside him, stooping now and again to pluck one of the big moon daisies that were a late autumn growth that year.

" There isn't much to tell, except that I made up my mind to enter an open heavy-weight contest that I saw advertised in the Sporting Life," said



Martin, diffidently, not caring much to talk about it, now that it was over.

"And was that why you suddenly gave up writing and took to long walks, and running, and two or three baths in a day?" persisted Daisy.

"Yes."

For a moment, it was Martin's sole reply, and she had to be content with it.

They walked for a few minutes in silence, and then, as if to make amends for his abruptness, Martin added, "I had to get the money, somehow, and there didn't seem to be much of a demand for my writings. But I'm going to get there as a writer, just the same!" he finished, earnestly, and Daisy felt bound to reply, "You will, because—oh, well, because I know that you will," she finished, with one of those little bursts of inconsequence that poor Martin found so utterly bewitching and wholly charming.

Of course, Daisy had to tell her aunt that Martin was in the village, and, forgetting her first horror of tangible evidence of the art of pugilism, she told of Martin's adventures in the ring with a great deal of pride.

Tears coursed down Miss Harland's white cheeks as she listened; her eyes glowed and shone.

"Send Jenny down to the 'Cobbler's Arms' with a message that he is to come up at once," she said, directly Daisy had finished.

She was careful to invent some errand for her young niece when Martin, looking very much ashamed of himself, put in an appearance.

As usual, he looked easily the most massive thing that the room contained.

Miss Harland drew the damaged face down between her thin white hands, and a strange choky feeling gripped Martin's throat when she kissed his forehead and said, in a low voice, "There, dear boy, that's an old woman's thank you for everything. If the world hadn't gone wrong for me, Martin—if I had married and had a son, I should have prayed for him to grow up like you."

The strange, choky feeling persisted obstinately in Martin's throat, and he did not reply at all as a coming literary lion might have been expected to reply.

He seemed to take the thing as a joke, for he said, "Poor little beggar!—would you?" but Miss Harland understood.

"I'm going next month, Martin, and the doctors seem to think that I'll be set up for years. But I can't afford to take Daisy, and that's what is worrying me night and day. I've got somebody to come and stay with her in the cottage while I'm gone, and she will go on teaching at the school until—if he ever does—Mr. Graham marries her."

Martin loved the old woman for that "if he ever does," and when she asked in her thin, feeble voice, "Will you promise to be her friend while I am gone?" he gripped the little white hand so that Miss Harland winced, and in the fervour of his reply, his recently acquired grammar suffered a bad lapse as he said, "You just bet I will!"

## CHAPTER XVI

**O**F course, I promised Gerald faithfully to keep the whole matter a secret."

"Oh, of course. But thank you so much for telling me, Julia. I have so often wanted to know exactly what happened. So that great hulking creature—a navvy, or something, wasn't he, when Gerald picked him up—so he is in love with Daisy Harland!"

Mrs. Graham pursed her lips together, and her brows creased into little ugly lines of anxious thought.

Her companion was Julia Milburn, who, motoring through the district, had called to see Gerald Graham.

He had just gone to the south of France on a visit for six weeks, his mother told the beautiful, restless, unhappy-looking society woman.

Mrs. Graham had just been listening to an account of the fight which had taken place in Miss Harland's parlour between Martin Eversley and her son.

She had seen Martin once or twice on her visits to town, but had scarcely deigned to notice him, and she listened to her son's enthusiastic praise of his companion with disdain.

"My dear Gerald, the man will probably get drunk and disgrace you, or else murder you in your sleep and rob you; in any case, all your efforts to

improve him will only meet with the utmost ingratitude," had been her manner of dismissing the subject.

If other things, of far greater weight, had not been oppressing her, she would certainly have enjoyed her little triumph over her son.

As it was, the knowledge of how he had come by the terrible punishment that he had received scarcely made a ripple on the current of her thoughts.

"At any rate, he is out of the way for six weeks, so he will not be able to marry that wretched little waif, unless she takes it into her head to follow him to France and inveigle him into marriage out there ; there is never any accounting for the actions of this class of person."

Mrs. Graham could not understand how anybody born a Graham could stoop to such as Daisy Harland. As she told her intimate friends, she could understand the girl well enough wanting to marry into a family like Gerald's ; she could even understand it after events made her son practically penniless, for even if he descended to the level of a pauper, he would still be a Graham !

It was Julia Milburn who, throwing a careless stone into the Graham pool, caused it to eddy in circles which were destined to affect her own, as well as other, lives.

"My dear Mrs. Graham, I've no doubt that if any other young man presented himself with sufficient money to marry her at once—a thousand or so—she'd throw poor old Gerald over like a shot !"



A disagreeable laugh completed the sentence.

"Do you really think so? You—you are a better judge of character than I, Julia. Does she strike you in that way? I—er—I might tell you that I even went so far as to plead with her myself to give up Gerald, when we heard that his great-uncle's will had been revoked. But she refused; in fact, she was most impertinent."

"Of course. But you didn't offer a substitute for Gerald, did you? In these days, a man of family, possessed of abilities such as Gerald undoubtedly has, is a catch for a penniless girl without even so much as a name. You can't blame the girl for hanging on to him—I don't," and Julia Milburn, having delivered herself in a fashion which was forcible, if slangy, lit a cigarette.

Far into the night, long after the girls, and the two servants who now represented the domestic staff at Weatherly Towers, had gone to bed, Mrs. Graham sat in the huge, sombre oak dining room, pondering, plotting, and scheming, in order to discover a way out.

By means of almost going on her knees, she had obtained a three months' delay on the foreclosure of the mortgage on her home. The holders had decided that they should take advantage of the huge increase in the value of property and sell Weatherly Towers in the open market.

"If you do such a thing, I shall commit suicide at once," Mrs. Graham declared, tragically.

Of course, Daisy represented the stumbling block to her plans.

There was no possible doubt that Gerald would have proposed to Elinor Morton, who was madly in love with him, and who, moreover, had ninety thousand of her own to back her love, had not Daisy Harland entangled his heart with her pretty face and demure, baby ways.

The old grandfather clock in the huge hall chimed solemnly twelve times. But still the figure over the fire sat on and on.

"I wonder if there is anything in what Julia surmised? I wonder if the girl could be got at in some other way?"

One o'clock was striking when Mrs. Graham at last took her candle and prepared to go up to bed.

She was crossing the hall when she noticed something white and folded—a newspaper, it looked like—on a round table.

She picked it up, idly at first. It was a London paper that was obtained specially for Gerald.

It would do to read for a few minutes in bed, thought the worried, unhappy woman, and she took it upstairs with her.

The candle light by which Mrs. Graham read flickered strangely on her white, worn face as she lay back on her pillows, pondering an idea which had suddenly occurred to her.

"I wonder if it could be done? He is in love with the girl, deeply and passionately in love, or he

would not have fought with Gerald in the way that he did."

The thin, nervous hand raised the newspaper once more to eyes that were feverishly bright, and once again they rested upon the portrait of the man whom the newspaper called "The Pugilist Poet."

Martin Eversley's face, handsome, confident, and above all, strong, smiled up at her, and underneath was a little paragraph which said :—

"We received by last night's post a charming little poem, of a very high literary order, signed 'Martin Eversley,' and as it is not a common name, we hastened to make further enquiries, and found that the author was, as we surmised, the winner of the Open Heavy-weight Contest at the Holborn Stadium last week.

"Mr. Eversley informed us that the literary arena, and not the boxing ring, was the goal of his ambitions. We publish his poem on another page, and think that we may safely venture our opinion that if the ring loses a champion boxer, the literary world will gain a future Poet Laureate."

Mrs. Graham read the article through once more, and she even glanced at the poem ; but it was not Martin Eversley's claim to literary distinction that occupied her thoughts—it was his possibilities as a husband for Daisy Harland.

He was in love with the girl, but could not try to win her because he had no money. That was Julia Milburn's view, and because she wanted to believe it, it was also Mrs. Graham's.

If she could succeed in getting Daisy married before Gerald returned from France, her load of anxiety would be lifted, for she knew Elinor Morton's possibilities regarding Weatherly Towers. The girl was extremely fond of the old place, and would insist upon keeping it in the family.

She fell asleep, to dream that Daisy was dressed in white satin and orange blossom, and that she was being married in the village church to Martin Eversley.



## CHAPTER XVII

**I** HAVE invited a young man down for the week-end."

Ailsa Graham looked up from her breakfast egg, and waited for further particulars.

Kitty immediately bubbled over with a characteristic mixture of eagerness and curiosity.

"Don't sit there as if young men come to this dull hole every day of the week, mother. Who is he? Do we know him?"

Mrs. Graham passed over the insulting reference to the home which was the chief passion of her life.

"He is Martin Eversley, your brother's former servant," she said.

"Are you not well, mother?"

It was Ailsa's polite way of expressing her opinion that her mother's brain had given way beneath her financial worries.

"What on earth have you invited him here for, mother?"

Kitty Graham was a direct little person, and the idea seemed to afford her some humour, for she gave vent to a merry peal of laughter.

"The newspapers called him the 'Pugilist Poet' last week!" she giggled, unrestrainedly.

"Nevertheless, he is coming as my guest, and I

shall expect both of you to extend the same courtesy to him as to any other guest."

Having imparted her news and given voice to her wishes, Mrs. Graham rose majestically and slowly left the dining room.

The two girls looked at each other. A greater contrast than this pair of sisters could scarcely be imagined.

"Well, here's a go! I wonder what Mother's got up her sleeve?" said Kitty, who was the first to speak.

"I wish you wouldn't be so vulgar, Kitty, and surely if mother chooses to have this man to the house, it is nothing to do with us," was Ailsa's chilling retort.

Very good-looking, without being beautiful, was Ailsa Graham, for beauty demands something more than fine blue eyes, a flawless skin, pale gold hair, and straight features; there was no inner light, no warmth to make the girl's beauty magnetic; without being told, it was quite easy to divine that she had never been in love.

And Mrs. Graham's two daughters were not the only ones to whom the invitation to spend a week-end at Weatherly Towers came as something of a mystery and a great deal of surprise.

Her letter had been forwarded to Martin by the newspaper which had printed his poem, and it had been couched in the warmest, most courteous terms.

"I have heard my son speak so often of you, and I have read your wonderful poem with the very keenest appreciation and delight. My son has gone

to the South of France for six weeks ; if he were here, I know that he would second my invitation."

" Would he ? I beg to think otherwise, Madam."

Martin's jaw was thrust out, and his eyes looked straight at the wall of his tiny bedroom at the " Cobbler's Arms. " Mrs. Graham's letter was in his hand.

" I wonder what she wants ; whether her son has put her up to some little game or another."

Martin became conscious of a vaguely disturbing feeling as he read and re-read the politely worded invitation, but he decided that it would be better to go, and for a reason which he was powerless to define, he refrained from mentioning to Daisy where he was going to spend the week-end.

There was a natural simplicity and dignity about Martin Eversley which made him equally at home in a mansion or a cottage.

Owing to his association with Gerald Graham, he had lost a number of little uncouth mannerisms which had been the result of ignorance, and, to see him now, in an evening suit of good cut and style, and to note his quiet, easy manner, nobody would have connected him, even remotely, with a boyhood of grinding poverty, and, up till a year or so ago, an existence wherein he was often hungry and homeless.

Ailsa Graham was startled when she saw Martin enter the drawing room a few minutes before dinner.

She had expected a wild, uncouth individual, who would probably address her as " Miss " and be puzzled to know what to do with his hands.

Instead, the tall, ruggedly handsome, splendidly healthy specimen of manhood who bowed quietly over her hand and said that he was delighted to know her might have been born a king's son, so profound was the impression that he made upon Ailsa.

Without knowing why, she became suddenly glad that she had, after all, taken a little trouble over her toilet.

She was in pale blue, and a band of silver gauze was threaded through her golden hair.

Martin was looking very earnestly at her, and almost unconsciously Ailsa felt flattered, and her somewhat colourless beauty became warmed up, as it were, and the result was certainly pleasing.

But Martin Eversley, though he looked at Ailsa Graham's delicate, highly-bred face, was not thinking of her.

He was wondering how this girl had treated Daisy ; whether she had prinked and giggled (as he called it) for her, and made her feel as welcome as she was trying to make him.

Kitty, to whom every male was an opportunity for a flirtation, had made up her mind that Martin Eversley, the " Pugilist Poet " as he was called, should be her own particular property for the week-end.

She was, therefore, both hurt and astonished when Ailsa calmly appropriated him instead.

Kitty, who, at seventeen, was still almost a child, sulked openly at dinner, and left most of the conversation to Ailsa and their guest.



What had happened to the usually cold, haughty Ailsa? Her fair cheeks were flushed, her blue eyes sparkled, and her tongue grew nimble and witty as she talked to Martin Eversley.

For twenty-three years Ailsa Graham had been asleep, and here, in a single moment of time, without the faintest regard for station, poverty, or wealth, Love had come, and all her pulses were dancing thrilling, dreaming, and responding to that mad, sweet passion which is at the very heart of things.

There are some who assert that Love cannot come in this wise; that it is a thing of slow, steady growth, founded upon the solid bedrock of mutual esteem, admiration, and worth.

To some Love may come in such a way; but there are other ways as well.

Love at first sight is as true as love after many years.

All unconscious of the madly beating heart of the girl at his side, Martin Eversley talked on, modestly, quietly, only touching on topics with which he was thoroughly familiar, and proving himself that which is far rarer than a good talker—an excellent, sympathetic listener.

After dinner, Kitty, still sulky, pleaded a headache as an excuse, and went up to her room.

Ailsa, whose soul was aflame with the most potent intoxicant in life, touched Martin lightly on the arm, and asked if he would like her to play.

"Please," said Martin, simply, as he took a chair opposite his hostess.

Ailsa's playing was part of herself that night ; the music in her own soul rushed forth and blended with that which her fingers made.

" Really, I have never heard you play so well, darling. Almost as if you were inspired," said her mother, looking keenly at her eldest daughter.

The wonderful rose colour which flushed Ailsa's face she put down to the fire, and she hastened to place a screen between it and Ailsa, remarking as she did so, " Your face is quite red, dear. The fire is too fierce ; so bad for the skin."

When Ailsa—who had let her hand linger in Martin's as long as she dared—had gone upstairs, Mrs. Graham turned to her guest.

" Now for it," thought Martin, who had an instinctive feeling that the object of this week-end visit was about to reveal itself.

" Mr. Eversley, I do not feel that we are strangers ; indeed, I feel that you are a very close friend, for had it not been for you, my boy would never have been alive to-day." Mrs. Graham made an effective pause.

Martin did his best to repress a smile ; in one way, it was not his fault that his former employer was still alive, for he had done his best to kill him on one certain night, he told himself, grimly. On the other hand, he had certainly saved his live once, out in South America ; that was how they had first come into contact.

" I feel that enough has not been done to show how very, very grateful we all are, dear Mr. Eversley,"

and Mrs. Graham laid a white hand upon Martin's shoulder.

Feeling a little foolish, wishing fervently that she would take her hand away, and not stand over him in that silly fashion, Martin tried to say that he had done nothing, and that, anyway, he had been well rewarded.

But this assertion only met with an arch smile of protest.

"Oh, but you must allow an old woman to have her own way," were Mrs. Graham's next very insincere words.

She certainly did not consider herself an old woman, and she would have been furious with anybody else who, even vaguely, suggested that she was one.

"I have been turning over in my mind for a long time what form the present should take. And it was—er—certain information which decided me. Forgive me if I seem personal," and here Mrs. Graham leaned her scented form towards Martin in a confidential attitude, "but is it not a fact that you are in love with little Miss Harland—a most charming girl, by the way."

Martin's face lit up, and into his eyes there came the ageless look of the man whose whole being is permeated with love, whose soul is reaching forth towards the highest, because nothing less will satisfy.

"Yes, I am."

He said the words curtly, almost defiantly; the air became tense with feeling.

Mrs. Graham took a deep breath before she plunged into the heart of things.

"I will give you a thousand pounds, free of any condition, if you will propose marriage to Daisy Harland, and get her to accept," she said.

Sheer, absolute astonishment held Martin dumb ; he could only stare at the daintily dressed woman sitting opposite to him, and a vague doubt as to her sanity took shape in the inmost recesses of his mind.

"I'm afraid I didn't get you," he said, lapsing temporarily into the slang of former days, in his confusion.

Those were the words that his lips uttered, because his wonderful powers of deduction had not yet been given time to operate ; but while Mrs. Graham, inwardly furious at having to bandy words with such as the man before her, repeated her offer, Martin's brain formulated the very reason for her proposal.

Love teaches cunning even to innocence, and Martin Eversley was a man with much experience of the world behind him ; that experience had taught him to look for the hidden snare in every action of supposed disinterestedness.

He looked now, and he found it.

"She doesn't fancy Daisy as a daughter-in-law, and, since the dear little girl insists on remaining loyal to her precious son, she thinks that I can be paid to marry her and so get her out of the way. Evidently her son, or somebody else, has told her the cause of the fight between us. Oh, no, my



dear scheming Madam, you don't ruin Daisy's happiness so easily! I'd give twenty years of my life to marry her myself, even for a few short years, but not unless she loved me."

These thoughts, so absolutely accurate, went rioting through Martin Eversley's brain while Mrs. Graham, in a voice of overdone sweetness, repeated, with a few additions, her apparently generous offer.

"We all liked dear Daisy so much, and—er—this is in confidence, of course, Mr. Eversley." Mrs. Graham leaned her scented form towards Martin and lowered her voice somewhat. "There is a girl living quite close to us—a very delightful girl, but not nearly so charming as Daisy—to whom my son has been paying more than—er—a little attention, lately. You know, he was engaged twice before he met Miss Harland," she finished, with a tiny sigh, which insinuated, as plainly as if she had spoken, that it was her son's wish to embark upon a fourth love affair.

There was a short silence in the big, gloomy oak dining room, when Mrs. Graham had finished.

Martin Eversley's eyes, straight glancing and coolly contemptuous, looked into hers, and his deep voice snapped, rather than spoke, the sentence which fell from his lips.

"If your son does not keep his promise to marry Daisy Harland, his next engagement will be with the undertaker!"

There was that in his voice and face which struck cold terror into the woman who listened; she

shivered ; never before had she been brought into contact with real, red-blood men and women. All those that she had known, from her earliest childhood, had been animated puppets, society lapdogs in a more or less degree, absolutely incapable of a passion so mighty that it could catch them up with its volcanic force and splendour, and set their pulses thrilling and dreaming of love and all that it entails.

“ Listen to me.”

Martin’s voice was curt, dictatorial ; for him no class barrier existed where this woman was concerned, she who calmly offered to pay him for persuading a girl to wreck her own happiness !

“ You are about the meanest thing in women I’ve ever had the misfortune to meet,” he said, deliberately.

Mrs. Graham’s face flamed scarlet ; she opened her mouth, but it was her turn to be dumb with astonishment.

Nobody had ever dared to speak to her like that in all her life.

“ You think I’m a low, common brute to talk like this—scum, in fact !” A little laugh finished the bitterly spoken sentence.

“ I might remind you, though, that scum inevitably rises to the top, and you’ll find it so in this case if you attempt to prevent Miss Harland from being happy in her own way, by marrying your son.” There was a finality in his voice that caused Mrs. Graham to greatly regret having invited him for the week-end, as he said, narrowing his eyes,

and hardening his mouth to a mere line, "If this engagement is broken off, it must be broken by Miss Harland, and by nobody else."

At last Mrs. Graham found her voice, which was choked with mingled indignation and fear.

"By what right do you presume to talk to me like this? If my men servants were here, I would call them and have you ejected from Weatherly Towers by force."

Mrs. Graham's blue brocaded bodice heaved with emotion, and her flushed cheeks, angry eyes, and haughty tilt of the head made her a very imposing figure.

But, in spite of this fact, a little chuckle, very boyish in quality, accompanied Martin's reply.

"There'd be a bit of a scuffle, I assure you," he said, whimsically.

Then he became serious, and passionately in earnest.

"Mrs. Graham," he said, leaning forward as he spoke, and letting his eyes rest upon her disdainful face. "I dare all this by the greatest right of all—the right of love for the girl whom we are discussing. You know," and his voice thrilled, while his hard eyes became softer as he spoke, "there is a point where love gets beyond one; where it becomes so big a thing that nothing on earth matters except the happiness of the beloved. I can't explain it; it's just there. I couldn't marry Daisy Harland unless she came to me, of her own free will, loving me with every breath, as I love her."

Mrs. Graham looked at her strange guest with a queer, wistful look in her eyes ; something inside her seemed suddenly to snap, and her heart felt as if it was being emptied of all that tied her to life. She felt lonely and miserable, and all the interests with which she had crowded her days seemed for the time being trivial and of no account.

Never had she felt or understood love as Martin Eversley evidently felt and understood it ; she had always deemed it the creation of novelists, and the ignorant pastime of servants. But here was a young, highly gifted man—a natural genius, in fact—whose whole being was transformed with love for a girl whom he never hoped to possess !

“ So, you see, I could not accept your offer, Mrs. Graham,” said Martin, finally, as he rose from his chair.

His hostess, too, rose. Her face looked drawn and white, and her eyes very sad.

“ No, I see that you cannot,” she replied.

“ Will you do me the favour not to let my son or Miss Harland know of this interview ?” she added, inwardly writhing with humiliation at the situation which she had herself created, yet knowing that being found out would be even more humiliating.

“ Of course.”

Martin gave his word readily.

“ And, if you don't mind, Mrs. Graham, I will leave Weatherly Towers to-night—at once,” he added, as if to make his meaning quite clear.



Mrs. Graham's pale face flushed ; she felt very guilty.

" But you can't go to-night. It's past twelve, and there is no train earlier than seven-thirty in the morning," she protested.

" It doesn't matter. I shouldn't be able to sleep, anyway, and the walk to London will do me good," he answered.

Suddenly, something in Mrs. Graham's miserable guilty-looking face filled him with compunction. His sunny smile flashed out, and there was real cordiality in his voice and in the grip of his hand as he took leave of his hostess.

" Forgive me for letting myself go to such an extent, but if you think quietly about it, and put yourself in my place, you'll be able to understand," he said.

Then, with a few conventional words of thanks for the hospitality that he had certainly not enjoyed Martin Eversley went up to his room, changed his clothes, and half an hour later, when one o'clock was striking, let himself out into the darkness, and set himself resolutely to tackle the twenty mile walk to London.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**I**T was a week later. Daisy knew nothing of Martin Eversley's visit to Weatherly Towers; she had supposed that his disappearance for the week-end was for the purpose of going up to town to transact some business.

Another match had been arranged, and the time for it was drawing very near.

Most of Martin's culture these days was physical rather than mental, though he still contrived to write when he could.

"I wish you were able to live by your brains instead of your fists. I—oh, somehow, I hate the thought of another man punching away at you, hurting you horribly, perhaps marking you for life, and all for what?—money!" and Daisy's clear young voice held a troubled note as she gave expression to her views, as did also her unclouded eyes.

Martin's pulses leapt at the thought of Daisy caring, ever so slightly, what happened to him.

He did not tell her the real reason why he continued with the best paying work he was capable of doing just then.

He was staying at Rose Cottage, partly to help eke out the slender housekeeping allowance, and

partly so that he could keep his promise to Miss Harland of "keeping an eye" on Daisy's welfare, as he put it, although his methods were so quiet and unobtrusive that she never for a moment suspected that he was bound by any promise to look after her.

When Miss Harland departed to Egypt, only one of the three bedrooms in the cottage was occupied.

An old friend of Miss Harland was installed as housekeeper, along with her husband, who, as an ex-postman, had a little pension, supplemented by the sale of the vegetables which he raised in the big garden which Rose Cottage boasted.

"My dear, I don't want payment for looking after you; it's a pleasure for two old town birds like us to come and live in the country for a spell, but," and here the good Mrs. Oakley's voice grew a trifle anxious, while she tied her fingers into knots beneath the corner of her snow-white apron—always, with her, a sign of agitation, "the money that you give me for housekeeping, Miss Daisy, isn't nearly enough; why, eighteen shillings a week don't go anywhere, not even in the country, where you grows your own vegetables, and keeps fowls," she finished positively.

Daisy grew red; she had just had her salary raised to forty shillings, but it was a hard struggle to buy boots and frocks and hats and coats, and the hundred other things indispensable to a girl's wear out of twelve shillings a week.

"I know, Mrs. Oakley," she said, in a faltering voice, "I know it's very little, but you are aware of just how we are placed, aren't you?" she said, deprecatingly. "Auntie only has barely enough to see her through her holiday in Egypt—it is doing her an immense amount of good, for I had a long, cheerful letter only this morning—and in a little place like this, there is nothing that I can do in my spare time to make more money. My salary has just been raised at the school, and I can't ask for another rise this year. Would—would another two shillings a week be of any use to you?"

Mrs. Oakley's reply was to fold Daisy in her arms and give her a warm, motherly kiss.

"Bless your heart, child, I didn't mean that!" she said, with a smile that reflected the kindness and sweetness of her disposition. "And, indeed, two shillings wouldn't go a long way towards making much difference. Two pounds might," she added, reflectively.

Before Daisy had time to reply, she hurried on, "There's two rooms vacant in the place, and I don't see why in the world that nice young gentleman who stops at the 'Cobbler's Arms'—Mr. Eversley, him that your aunt is so fond of—I don't see in the least why he should give Tom Alder the benefit of his money, who's got plenty and to spare. I could make him just as comfortable here, and he wouldn't get in your way, Miss Daisy. Seeing that your aunt likes the young gentleman,



which I do, too, and he's a friend of yours, and you engaged and all, well, I don't see why—"

The good woman broke off for a fresh supply of breath; she did not see Daisy's delicate skin flush rose-red as she replied, "Very well, Mrs. Oakley, if you don't mind having him, I'll ask him to-night."

That was how Martin Eversley went back to dwell beneath the same roof as the girl whose inaccessibility made his life more bitter than sweet, and yet, powerless in the toils of the Love that had become part of his life, he could not resist the temptation to be near her.

His money certainly made a difference to the little household, and, while Daisy taught her class, Martin Eversley wrote and studied, and kept himself in rigid training for his second boxing match, never wasting a minute of his working hours.

It was his secret ambition to buy a little car and take Daisy, and Mr. and Mrs. Oakley for some trips to the beauty spots in and around the county, if he won the contest.

And he meant to win! Every nerve, every sinew was being braced for the coming ordeal, and when Daisy spoke about her horror of the sport which was the finest game in the world to him, he just threw back his splendidly shaped head and laughed.

"There's nothing revolting in boxing, Daisy; it's the cleanest, finest sport there is. It's the

surest test of a man—his fitness for the ring. One has to live a clean and simple life to play the game ; exercise, regular hours, no making a pig of oneself over delicate food, no drinking, no smoking, nothing that will hurt the body which, the Bible tells us, is the Temple of God. And those blows you are so afraid of—why,” Martin Eversley laughed again, a hearty joyous laugh that seemed to hold some of the morning sunshine in its depths, “ they don’t hurt much in the excitement, and they heal in a marvellously short space of time, simply because the body is so fit, so full of health and strength,” he said, with the easy assurance of the man who knows what he is talking about.

If Gerald Graham could have seen him, looking so handsome, and simply radiating health and energy, in company with Daisy, who had met him coming from a pre-breakfast run as she was on her way to school, he might have been vaguely uneasy.

But he need not have been ; though her faith in her lover had received several rude shocks, Daisy still wore the rose-hued bandage which Love invariably ties around the eyes of those who are to marry, and she had forgiven—even persuaded herself that she had forgotten—her lover’s past unsatisfactory conduct.

They parted at the school-house, Daisy being immediately pounced upon by a crowd of adoring children, having had no time to discuss a letter which lay in her pocket, and which she had received that morning.

Going home to dinner at twelve o'clock, she pulled it out of her pocket once again, and a thoughtful crease came between her brows as she studied it.

"It's about the last thing in the world I should have expected of Ailsa, and I cannot think why she should choose a little country school like ours. With the influence that she is almost bound to possess, I should have thought that she could easily have got a better post," Daisy murmured, in a puzzled voice as she walked slowly along the lane.

Little she knew how Ailsa Graham had used influence in order to obtain the post of second mistress in the Lynton village school.

"Mother, where is Mr. Eversley?" had been her first question when she had come down in the morning to find that no place had been laid for him at the breakfast table.

Her mother averted her eyes, which were alight with an eager glow that was quite foreign to their usual cold, somewhat critical expression.

"He had an urgent telegram and had to leave very early," replied Mrs. Graham, busying herself with an egg.

Ailsa's face fell, but she said nothing. Neither her mother nor her sister—Kitty was still indulging in a childish fit of sulks and took no notice whatever of Ailsa—heeded the fact that she ate nothing; they were too preoccupied themselves.

Ailsa had hardly slept the whole night, but she

was not listless and tired, and worn out ; on the contrary, if her own people had had the eyes to behold it, she was transformed by the greatest beautifier, the most wonderful stimulant that the whole world knows.

Ailsa had lain awake, thrilling to the recollection of everything connected with Martin Eversley—his splendid frame, his deep, quiet voice, air of command, and handsome features.

“ Oh, what does an accident like birth matter ? ” she asked herself impatiently, when a little jarring note crept into her blissful dream—the sure and certain knowledge that her mother would furiously oppose and ridicule the idea of love between a man like Martin Eversley and herself.

“ Gerald, anyhow, would be unable to say anything. I can understand now how he feels about Daisy,” she told herself, and she was glad that she had taken no part in the polite freezing of her future sister-in law during her stay with them ; she had merely stood contemptuously aloof, and even if she tried, Daisy would not be able to recall anything unkind in her behaviour towards her.

It was Lady Diana Pierson, at whose garden-party the kiss had been stolen, which represented the first rift in the lute of Daisy’s love, who gave Ailsa Graham the inspiration for which she had sought vainly through several dreamy idle days.

Lady Diana had stopped on at the house in Lynton which she had really only taken for the summer months, owing to a sudden wish on her



husband's part to leave England altogether. They had sold their town house, and were going abroad later on, but just at present she was trotting round, as she called it, visiting friends, and chance had brought her for a week-end to Weatherly Towers.

"I see that Miss Harland is back at the school, teaching. Very sensible of her—what a charming girl she is—I tried to recommend her for the second mistress's post, which is vacant—I'm on the board of management, you know, one must kill time somehow in a country village—but the rest wouldn't hear about it, idiotic creatures—said she was too young, or something," said Lady Diana, all in one breath as she nibbled a macaroon and passed her cup to be refilled with tea.

"That curious person who used to be your son's valet has gone to stay at the cottage as a lodger. I suppose it's pretty hard to make ends meet on Miss Harland's salary, with her aunt away. It would have been much more sensible to have tried to let the cottage, and for the girl to have boarded with a family in the village, but the elder Miss Harland wouldn't hear of it, it seems; very stupid, I call it," finished Lady Diana, emphasising the pronoun, and seeming to imply that her opinion settled the whole matter.

Mrs. Graham was secretly gratified by the news that Martin Eversley was under the same roof as Daisy. Who knew what might come of it?

She brightened up and chattered gaily to Lady Diana, and utterly failed to notice the preoccupation

of her elder daughter, who had suddenly taken to long, lonely walks, reading poetry, and playing all by herself in the dark before the lamps were lighted.

"If only I could get the post, and be near him! I will make him love me—love like mine must awaken a response," thought the ignorant, inexperienced girl, who thought that her experience was unique, that it only needed propinquity in order to set a like passion flaming in the heart of the man on whom she had chosen to bestow her love.

A few days after Lady Diana got back to Lynton, she received a carefully worded letter from Ailsa, in which, saying that it was now necessary for her to earn her own living, she asked if she would be kind enough to use her influence and obtain her the post in the Lynton school if it was still vacant, stating her qualifications in a most business-like way.

Her qualifications were more than sufficient for the post she sought, and it seemed quite natural and—in Lady Diana's eyes—an extremely sensible request.

"The post is still vacant. I will certainly put you up for it, my dear," she wrote to the delighted girl, who did not tell her mother about it until the whole thing was settled.

"Mother, I have obtained the post of second mistress at the Lynton school, where Daisy Harland teaches. I cannot stay here any longer,

eking out an existence which holds nothing but screwing and scraping to make ends meet. I shall get two pounds five shillings a week, to start with, and that, with the hundred a year I already possess, will keep me in a little village, I daresay," said Ailsa at breakfast one morning, as she passed a blue, official looking envelope to her mother, striving, as she spoke, to keep her voice calm, and to suppress the quickened beating of her heart beneath her correct Viyella blouse.

It was not hard to win Mrs. Graham's consent, as her one aim and object was the pacifying of the holders of the mortgage on Weatherly Towers; so long as she was not doing anything to occasion comment, she did not greatly mind Ailsa's departure from home.

"It seems very dull work to take up—teaching in a country school—but I suppose it is more comfortable and certainly safer than driving a motor car or becoming a police-woman," was Mrs. Graham's somewhat vague comment.

Ailsa's letter to Daisy, which she had received that morning, was the first indication that the vacant post at the school was to be filled by her future sister-in-law. Rumour had been busy in every quarter but the right one, it seemed.

It was quite a charming letter. Daisy was utterly ashamed and quite unable to fathom the slight feeling of antagonism that she felt at the idea of the arrival of Ailsa to take up life along with her.

"My dear Daisy," the letter ran, "I am sure

that you will be surprised to learn that I have been appointed second mistress of the school in which you teach. I am told that languages, (with the exception of elementary French), and music, are not necessary, but I thought that I might keep up my Russian and Spanish by teaching you in the evenings, if you would care to learn. We could also learn some duets together, if you like. I cannot tell you how lucky I think myself to have dropped into the post (which I got through Lady Diana) and I do hope that we shall be very great friends. We can compare notes about Gerald, can't we? Mother and Kitty send their love, and so do I.

Ailsa.

P.S.—Could you find me a nice, clean, comfortable room in the village? "

It was the postscript more than the rest of the letter that troubled Daisy.

With a spare room at the cottage she could hardly let Ailsa go to strangers. She wondered if Mrs. Oakley would object to waiting upon a second paying guest. But that good woman was more than willing to oblige Daisy.

"We shall be a rival to the 'Cobbler's Arms' presently," she said, and then, as the thought struck her, she added with a broad smile, "I'll save up what's over and above Miss Graham's keep, and give your auntie a surprise when she comes home, Miss Daisy."

"That is very sweet of you, dear Mrs. Oakley,"



said Daisy, with a warm glow at her heart. There had been so much goodness and kindness in her life ; she was an ungrateful girl not to wish to share her home with another, who had met with misfortune, and she told herself sternly that she ought to be ashamed of herself as she sat down and wrote the letter which sent Ailsa into transports of delight, in which she invited her to stay under the same roof as herself and Martin Eversley.

" I hope you won't mind Mr. Eversley. He has been here a long time now, and it seems brighter with a man about the house. He is not indoors very much, and goes to bed early, so, although you would be stopping in the same house, you would not see much of him," wrote the unsuspecting half apologetic Daisy, considering Martin's former relationship to her brother.

She need not have troubled.

Ailsa picked up the newspaper containing the notice about the " Pugilist Poet," with the portrait of Martin above the article, and she kissed the pictured face over and over again, in passionate ecstasy.

" It is a sign that Fortune is on my side. I will win you, Martin, before another month is gone," she told herself, confidently.

## CHAPTER XIX

**G**OOD-BYE, Mr. Eversley, and the very best of luck to you."

There were tears in Ailsa Graham's eyes and her voice was very tender as she spoke ; she allowed her hand to rest just a fraction of a second longer than necessary in Martin's palm.

Martin felt vaguely troubled ; he did not know why. He also felt a little bit ashamed because he could not infuse as much warmth as he felt he ought into his liking for the girl.

Nobody could deny that Ailsa was a huge success from every point of view.

She fulfilled her duties admirably at the school, she gave very little trouble at the cottage, was very charming to Daisy, and it seemed that she could not do enough to show Martin that the fact of his being at one time her brother's servant made no difference whatsoever to her.

Daisy was completely won over, and would hardly spend an hour out of the society of her future sister-in-law, telling herself that she was the luckiest girl in all the world to have found such a friend as Ailsa.

She sent long, enthusiastic letters to Gerald Graham, who wrote back hurriedly, assuring her

that she was for ever in his thoughts, yet not troubling to write more than a few brief lines.

He was having a good time, and his friends had persuaded him to stay on ; it was a great rest and change after the beastly time that he had just been through, and so on.

And poor little Daisy, who wanted to know what constituted the good times, and to share them with him, even if it was only on notepaper, grew somewhat big-eyed and wistful, and at length began to wish that he would say something about coming home and making a start at some kind of work, if their engagement was not to be a lifelong one.

At this time, Ailsa was a great consolation ; and she distracted Daisy's mind as much as she could by helping her with her music and teaching her a couple of new languages.

French and German Daisy knew quite as well as she did.

Daisy had said goodbye to Martin a little earlier, and Ailsa had lingered behind in order to be alone with him at the last.

It was the day of the great boxing match. A hundred thousand people were to watch the contest, which was for a thousand pounds, that night.

As she looked at Martin, who, in magnificent form, was to her a hero, a very king amongst men, she felt her pulses leap and thrill towards him.

" You know how our hearts will be with you," she murmured, with a long, lingering hand-clasp.

"Thank you. I'll send a telegram the moment it's over, and if I'm not too badly punished, I'll come back to-morrow; but if I have to stay in London for a few days, you and Daisy will understand, won't you?" he said, with his winning smile.

The contest was one which excited the anger and scarcely veiled contempt of public and critics alike. It was what the newspaper men called "a walk over" for Martin Eversley, who was not the favourite. Only two rounds were fought.

When they received the telegram announcing his victory, both girls, waiting with as much patience as they could muster in the little chintz and silver parlour, went almost mad with delight.

"He will be able to give it up, and devote himself to worthier work," was Daisy's relieved, thankful thought.

"He will be able to marry on a thousand pounds," was what lay behind her companion's smooth white brow.

But Daisy's thoughts of worthier work for Martin, as well as those of marriage which dwelt in Ailsa's love-sick mind, were destined to be denied fruition for many a long day.

When they came in from afternoon school, Mrs. Oakley met them, with red, swollen eyes, and a tear-stained face.

"It's Mr. Martin," she sobbed, in answer to the anxious enquiry of the two girls. "He bought a motor car, it seems, and drove it all the way from



London by himself until he got to that nasty hill just outside the village. Then the thing turned over, and he's lying upstairs for dead. The doctor's with him," she added, between her sobs.

The two girls received the disquieting news in such an utterly different fashion from each other that Mrs. Oakley stared, open-mouthed, in surprise.

Daisy went white to the lips, and her blue eyes became almost black with tense feeling.

Ailsa, however, uttered a loud, piercing shriek, and raced up the narrow staircase to the room where Martin was lying, still unconscious, with the doctor and the village nurse bending over him.

The latter, hearing the noise of running feet, came to the threshold, a look of mild enquiry upon her face.

"I—they told me that Mr. Eversley was dead! Oh, it isn't true—tell me that it isn't true!" she gasped, clutching hold of the woman's blue-clad arm with nervous fingers that seemed to be made of steel rather than flesh.

"What is the matter?" asked the doctor, coming to the door for a moment.

His expression changed when he saw who it was; he was young and unmarried, had but recently come to the place, and for weeks past he had been in love with the pretty new mistress at the village school.

"Mr. Eversley is badly hurt, but he is not dead; he has an enormous amount of vitality, and will make a fairly quick recovery if we can get him over

the first few days, and can ease his pain. I am sorry that it is quite impossible to move him in his present condition. In a few days, perhaps, he can be taken to the hospital, but just at present—" and the doctor finished his sentence with a half apologetic movement of his shoulders.

But Ailsa's pale face crimsoned with the wave of emotion which rushed over her—she could just see Martin's big, still figure resting on the bed in the dim blue twilight—and it needed all the centuries of self-controlled ancestors who were behind her and who had bequeathed her a measure of their reserve, to prevent her from brushing the doctor aside and kneeling by the bed, to cover the white face with passionate kisses.

Instead, Ailsa controlled herself, and said, in as normal a voice as she could, "But, of course, Mr. Eversley will stay here. There are three of us to share the work of nursing him. I am quite sure that Mrs. Oakley will insist upon it, and if there is any question of expense, I will be responsible."

She spoke as if she had a fortune at her command. Her voice was so strange, and her manner so full of self-repression that the young doctor came a step nearer and looked keenly at the flushed, beautiful face; but the twilight was kind and revealed very little, if anything at all.

"It would be a mighty funny thing if—but how ridiculous! A pugilist who is admittedly from the scrap-heap of humanity, and a girl like

Ailsa Graham, niece of Lord Geldon, and the daughter of one of the proudest women in England!"

The doctor dismissed the thought with a slight feeling of disgust.

"I don't think it would be so much a matter of expense as inconvenience, considering that the newspapers are full of Mr. Eversley's achievement of last night. He will get a thousand pounds for his ten minutes in the ring," he said, a trifle wistfully.

"May I come in?" asked Ailsa, not, apparently, having heard what the young doctor had said.

"I think so. He is still unconscious, but I have dressed his wounds, and there is nothing now to be done but to feed him at intervals, and wait until he recovers his senses. Miss Wilkins has arranged to stay the night with him, but, with such injuries to his head as he has sustained, he may be unconscious for two or three days."

He stood aside to let Ailsa enter.

So still, so deathly still the room seemed, as if the Dark Angel already hovered over it.

Ailsa caught her breath with a little gasp as she stepped to the side of the bed and looked down upon the marble white face of the man she loved.

"Oh, God, let him live! Let him live!" was the prayer in her heart.

She longed to press her lips to the mouth which, in repose, was never stern, but only sweet-tempered and very humorous.

Martin's head was covered with medical bandages,

but his face was unmarked, either by the accident or the fight.

When Ailsa raised her eyes, Daisy and Mrs. Oakley were by her side ; she had not heard them enter the room.

Evidently neither of them suspected.

"Isn't it terrible? The doctor was rather guarded, but on the whole, hopeful. Whatever did he want to buy a car for?" said Daisy, in a hushed, choked little voice which betrayed her pain.

Then—it seemed almost uncanny, as if the unconscious man had heard and understood the question—Martin's voice, low and feeble, but quite clear, broke the tension of the atmosphere. His head rolled restlessly and his eyelashes flickered, as if he were about to open his eyes, but he did not do so.

"It's such a fine little car, and I'm going to call her after you, Daisy. I gave five hundred cash down for her, and she's worth it. Oh, my darling, if only it was going to take us on our honeymoon!"

Daisy's face went suddenly scarlet, and she bit her lip.

He had not got over his hopeless love, it seemed ! Somehow, she wanted to cry.

"Come along, Ailsa, the poor fellow doesn't know what he is saying" and she slipped her arm in that of her friend and half led her from the room, just as the doctor, who had been to wash his hands, came back to give some final instructions to the nurse.



There is no woman living whose love for another of her sex does not turn to immediate and violent dislike if she happens to fall in love with, or be loved by, the man whom she wants for herself.

Ailsa Graham was not conscious of any particular liking for Daisy, but she was anxious not to offend her, for upon her depended the length of her stay at the cottage.

She tried to persuade herself that Martin's ravings meant nothing, that sick men never spoke truly. She would like to have asked, point blank, if he had ever made love to Daisy, but though she had been brought up so simply in utter ignorance of the ways of what is called "society," Daisy Harland was every whit as refined, and in essentials a far greater lady than herself. Ailsa knew that any attempt to force her future sister-in-law's confidence upon a subject would be repulsed.

"You look so utterly miserable and worn-out, Ailsa, dear. Let me go down and make you a cup of tea," said Daisy, when, at ten o'clock, they were brushing out their hair for the night.

"No, thank you."

Ailsa refused coldly, almost rudely. She looked with angry, jealous eyes upon Daisy's charming, flower-like face, and dainty little figure.

"She is far prettier than I, and —he loves her!"

The thought persisted, and she got no comfort even from the sight of her brother's engagement ring, which Daisy wore on a ribbon around her

neck during the daytime, not caring to wear it during school hours.

Martin Eversley was not the type of man who could flit quite happily from one love to another, bestowing an equal amount of affection upon each, like her brother Gerald.

Daisy might not love him, but if he loved her, he would remain true to that love, until Death came and wrote *Finis* to the story.

Daisy had moved Ailsa's bed into her own room because she had asked if one of the rooms might be turned into a private study.

"Certainly," had been Daisy's ready reply, and now the two little white beds stood in the same room, side by side.

Daisy kissed Ailsa as usual, when she retired for the night, but, thinking constantly of Martin and the confession that had unwittingly fallen from his poor, senseless lips, she could not sleep, though she refrained from tossing and turning, because the springs of her bed creaked with the slightest movement, and she was afraid of disturbing Ailsa.

At length, when it was near midnight, Daisy fell into a light sleep, but a strange, stealthy, unusual movement in the room aroused her, and she sat up in bed, looking, wild-eyed and alert, into the darkness.

There was a moon, and the windows were open ; her first thought was for Ailsa, and she turned quickly to see if she was all right. But she was gone!

The bedclothes were turned right down, as if they had been flung off with a vigorous, impatient movement, and Ailsa's candle was missing from the little table by her bed, and her dressing gown was gone from the peg behind the door.

An uneasy feeling took possession of Daisy, but presently she laughed.

"How silly of me! She had probably gone to get a glass of water," she said, trying to shake off the feeling of uneasiness.

But it was no good, and presently, slipping on her own dressing gown, Daisy went downstairs.

But Ailsa was not in the kitchen or the scullery, nor in the sitting-room. She had not gone out, because all the doors were fast.

Daisy crept noiselessly up the stairs, and next tried the little study. It was hardly likely that she was in Mrs. Oakley's room, and the doctor had given strict orders to the nurse that nobody was to be admitted to Martin's room during the night.

"But she must be somewhere," argued Daisy, and then, very gently, she turned the handle of Martin's door, an apology to the nurse already upon her lips.

"I am sorry," she began, but that was all that she said.

A cold numbness took possession of her as she stood there, gazing upon a spectacle that filled her with an emotion for which there was no name, for, while she was conscious of an agonising pain,

at the same time she seemed to be robbed of the power to feel and think.

Ailsa Graham was kneeling upon the floor by Martin's bed, her fair hair streaming over her shoulders, the swansdown which formed the trimming of her rose-velvet dressing gown trailing on the cheap linoleum with which the floor was covered.

"My darling, you shall love me—you must—why do you keep speaking her name? She does not love you; she is engaged to my brother. Oh, my king amongst men, love me—me." Ailsa's voice pleaded, and her words trailed away in a sob that had in it nothing of girlishness; it was a woman's weeping, not a young girl's easy sentimental outburst of tears.

Ailsa was twenty-four, and had never had a love affair, not even the mildest flirtation, in all her life.

Daisy felt as if she had been caught eavesdropping, and, silently, with burning cheeks, she closed the door noiselessly, and stole back to the bedroom, unobserved by the girl who, still kneeling, self-absorbed, was by the side of the man she loved.

It was about ten minutes later when Ailsa returned, and Daisy closed her eyes, pretending to be asleep.

But there was no sleep for her during the rest of that agonising night, the memory of which flamed in her heart as long as she lived.

The truth, stripped bare of all adornment, was



that Daisy Harland had, in those few moments spent by the open door of Martin Eversley's room, passed from the state of being in love with love—which is a state responsible for more marriage tangles and life tragedies than any other—to the fulness of the grand passion itself.

She was no longer a child playing with love like a toy—it had suddenly rushed upon her, with terrific force and terrifying clarity of vision, that, hitherto, she had been dreaming, and now she had awakened, to what?—to find herself bound to a man whom she now knew that she never had loved, would never love, so long as she had life.

It had taken the sight of another woman, on her knees beside him, kissing him and calling him by sweet, endearing names, to bring her to a sense of the realities of Life.

“Martin, I love you,” her heart cried, and though there was pain, there was also joy in its deepest depths, for the recollection of a night in summer—a walk in the garden, all moon-silvered and fragrant with the scent of flowers—came back to her, and she heard Martin's deep, quiet voice telling her with an earnestness which now brought a rush of the most exquisite pleasure, that he loved her, that he would always love her, and that he would scale the stars and get her the moon for a plaything, if she wished it, and if such a thing were possible.

Nothing, not even the fact that she was engaged to another man, or that his sister loved Martin, could dim the joy of Love's awakening, or destroy

the knowledge that out of the world's men, her heart, her nature, her very soul had chosen him for her mate.

Daisy was a sweet-natured, honest, frank-hearted girl, as upright as any English girl could be, but she was not a little plaster saint; she was very normal in every way, had her own faults and failings like the rest of humanity, and, above and beyond all, she was in love. No girl in love brooks a rival, be it man or woman.

There were difficulties in the way—her engagement to Gerald Graham would have to be broken off; she experienced almost a feeling of relief in recalling his lapses of conduct. In the light of her clearer understanding, she saw that it was very unlikely that he would suffer greatly, when he learned that she could not marry him.

He would probably be quite pleased, once he had got over the first soreness, for he would then be free to marry somebody who could help him on in the world, and—a faint smile wreathed Daisy's lips as the thought occurred to her—she knew one who would be pleased if the engagement were broken off! Mrs. Graham would certainly go down on her knees and thank Heaven if her son could be freed from what she called "a most undesirable entanglement."

Six hours later, not having slept till dawn, yet feeling buoyed up and strangely elated, Daisy was teaching nursery songs to her class of babies,—teaching them mechanically, for the greater portion

of her mind was at home, where Martin was still lying unconscious.

If she had been gifted with second sight, and could have known what was taking place at Weatherly Towers, if even a hint of the vile plot that was being hatched against her happiness had been given to her, Daisy's heart would not have been so full of love and hope—for, somehow, she knew that Martin would not die—that sunny autumn morning.

## CHAPTER XX

**T**HE great drawing room of Weatherly Towers, with its chair covers of faded brocade, worked by hands that had lived centuries ago, was very quiet and exceedingly lonely.

Something depressing, something cruel and mocking and very bitter, seemed to lurk in its carved splendour, and Julia Milburn, who had been shown into the room by a servant, looked around the magnificent apartment with a shudder, wondering wherein lay its fascination for its mistress. Her own taste inclined towards black carpets and purple hangings, it was true, but those things were fashionable just then, and therefore quite understandable.

Julia Milburn's appearance was in keeping with her mood of irritable depression, for she was attired from head to foot in black, while a long widow's veil floated from a wide-brimmed hat and reached almost to the hem of her skirt at the back.

But the effect, with Julia's vivid colouring, glossy black hair and beautiful blue eyes, was one by no means to be despised. Widow's weeds became Julia, and she knew it, and what was more, she intended to wear them until the very last minute.



But, if she had to mourn outwardly, she had not the slightest inclination to do so inwardly. Indeed, she was more than a little inclined to look upon her young husband's death from double pneumonia as a direct piece of luck, for, with his positively mediaeval ideas on wifely duty and devotion, life was becoming something to endure rather than enjoy.

But, though from her manner of living, nobody would have deemed Julia Milburn capable of a passion for anybody but herself, yet, on the night of her husband's death, when she was in her bedroom alone, supposed to be prostrate with grief, she had looked at herself in the mirror with a glance of appreciation for the beauty that showed no signs of diminishing, and muttered fiercely, "Free!"

She repeated the word which seemed to signify so much four or five times, and then she added, "Now I can win back Gerald. It should not be so hard to get him away from the little bread-and-butter frump down in the country. I expect that he is already tired of her."

The young widow, observing all the outward signs of mourning, received the more or less sincere condolences of her friends, shut up her town house, and then went down to Lynton to pay a visit to her friend, Lady Diana Pierman.

Daisy, to whom she was barely civil, she had met once, and Ailsa, who, to her surprise, was not so friendly as before, she had met on three occasions.

Then Fate, which inevitably favours evildoers

up to a certain point, put her by chance into the possession of a weapon which was destined to scourge Daisy Harland's spirit until, faint and weary, heartily sick of God's gift of life, she longed to lay down the burden of it and die.

A rustle of silk gave due warning of Mrs. Graham's approach.

Julia Milburn composed her face and waited.

"You poor dear! How glad I am to see you."

The words of conventional condolence were accompanied by the merest peck of a kiss, and even a casual observer would have known from Mrs. Graham's air of intense pre-occupation that she was not in the least interested in the details for which she pressed.

"And was poor Jack's end painless? Oh, I hope so, for it is terrible to be in pain at the end. I remember what an impression my husband's death left upon me, for years afterwards."

Mrs. Graham's curiously mechanical voice began to get on her visitor's nerves.

"Do you mind if we go into a smaller room? This one always did depress me," said Julia, with a little shiver.

The woman who had so nearly been her mother-in-law rose and led the way to the door.

"Come into my boudoir; they should not have shown you in here, and besides, it is cold without a fire," she added, quite kindly, for she had liked Julia Milburn better than any of her prospective daughters-in-law.

"That's ever so much better," said Julia, cheerily, from the depths of an armchair, as, having finished her tea, she crossed one leg over the other, and produced the gold cigarette case which accompanied her everywhere.

"Any news of Gerald?" was Julia's apparently careless question of her hostess, when her weed was fairly lighted.

The mention of her son's name seemed to galvanise the apathetic woman into instant, indignant life.

"The worst," she said, shortly.

"Ah! How's that?" was Julia's seemingly nonchalant comment.

Mrs. Graham gave vent to the sound which is best described by the word "snort."

"I wrote him a long letter, explaining how terribly serious things were with regard to Weatherly Towers—the home of his forefathers for six hundred years, as you well know, Julia—and I begged him, using every inducement I could think of, to give up this penniless country school teacher to whom he has engaged himself, and, and . . ." the tears stood in Margaret Graham's eyes as she indulged in retrospective thought, "what do you think he wrote in reply?" she asked, tears choking her voice.

"What?" asked Julia, who was not in the least affected.

"He wrote . . . but wait a minute . . . you can read the letter." She moved across to a little satinwood bureau, at which Mary, Queen of Scots,

was once said to have written a letter, and she took therefrom her son's last hastily scrawled note.

It was singularly brief and unsympathetic. It has been said that there is never a man born into the world, be he never so deficient in good looks, manners or other desirable attributes, who cannot win the love and admiration of at least one woman.

Gerald Graham was certainly not wholly deficient in these qualities which go to make a man lovable, but the affection which he managed to inspire in most women was certainly far in excess of what he deserved.

"My dear Mater, why worry yourself grey about the mouldy old barn?" the letter ran. "Let the Jews have it, and clear out. You'd be much happier in London in a flat Kensington way. The girls might get off, too. Cheero. Gerald."

Julia smiled at the phrase "get off," she knew quite well what it meant. Living in the past, and certainly never having exposed herself to modern slang, Mrs. Graham had been obliged to get her youngest child to translate for her; and when she had found out, she almost hated her son for his vulgar method of expressing himself.

Julia Milburn was about to hand back the letter with a few polite words, when suddenly an idea occurred to her which made her take her half smoked cigarette from her lips, and throw it into the fire.

"It was partly to tell you of a discovery that I have made about the Harland girl—whose name by the way, is not Harland any more than it is



yours—that I came to see you to-day,” said Julia Milburn, briskly.

The effect of the words was magical. The look of dull apathy left the elder woman’s eyes, and a curiously vindictive gleam came into them. Quite clearly she hoped that the young widow’s discovery was something to Daisy’s discredit.

“Tell me,” she said, eagerly, leaning forward, anticipation in every line of her face and figure.

Julia Milburn coughed.

“I have been spending a few days with Di Pierman down at Lynton, and, as you know, she takes an interest in all the snuffy old women in the village—sheer boredom, she says. I used to go with her sometimes, and one afternoon I happened to drop in to see a special crony of hers, an old blind woman who had been on the point of death so many times that nobody took much notice when she said she felt ill.”

Julia Milburn paused, anticipating the question which, of course, was asked.

“What did she tell you about Daisy?” said Mrs. Graham, in her harsh, anxious tones.

“Well, she said, in the presence of the doctor and myself that Daisy was her own grand-daughter; that, late one winter night, her daughter, who was in service in Exeter, came with the baby and told her that she wanted to leave it on the steps of the local Union, but that she had not had a chance to do so, unobserved. The old creature was almost blind,

then, and was living alone, her husband was dead, and all her children were out in the world as she put it. In spite of her protests, it seemed that the lively Lizzie left the child with her, and went off, saying that she was going to Canada. Mrs. Horrex had the brilliant notion of leaving it on Miss Harland's doorstep, and there you are—the whole thing explained."

Mrs. Graham's face was white with mental anguish, and yet, beneath the pain, a fierce hope sprang to life that the sordid story would have the effect of preventing Gerald from marrying such a girl.

"How dreadful! How absolutely unthinkable it is that such a creature has sat at my table, mixed with my friends on terms of equality, and will actually become a Graham unless Gerald can be made to see reason."

The groan which accompanied the sentence was so sincere that the situation was robbed of the element of humour which it would certainly have contained for any other sane, thinking individual.

One would have thought that Daisy was the reverse of the charming, and altogether desirable, girl that she was.

Even if the old woman had been right—and it turned out that she was most emphatically wrong—still, despite her humble birth, Daisy Harland would have been the equal of any lady, simply because she was, in all essential things, the ideal of one.

The look of hopeless misery in Mrs. Graham's eyes faintly touched even Julia Milburn's flinty heart.

"You needn't look so glum," she observed, lighting another cigarette. "Daisy Harland was not the old woman's grand-daughter at all; she may, for all we know, be the daughter of a duke or an earl. If the story is true—and I've no reason to doubt it—that was told to me the following day, she is a lady," she finished, being purposely mysterious.

"Yes, yes. But who is she, then?" asked Mrs. Graham, in quick, emphatic tones.

"I don't know," was the aggravatingly cool reply.

"Listen. It's a most interesting story, and even if it's untrue, Daisy Harland cannot be the child of the woman I saw, for she has a daughter exactly four months younger than Daisy; she showed me her birth certificate, to prove her statements," said Julia Milburn, with exasperating calmness.

"How did you find out where she lived?" interrupted Mrs. Graham.

"From the old woman. She wanted me to beg her daughter to acknowledge her own child, saying that she would not rest in the grave unless she did. I went to the address, and found it to be a tenement in a poor quarter of the Mile End Road. The woman is called Lizzie Carson, and is a slatterny, untidy creature, who looks as if she drinks. Boiled down, her story is that, living near, she was calling on a friend who kept a public house in a little village near Exeter, and she had her own baby, four months old, with her. A stranger came to the place—a

beautiful young woman, poorly dressed, but who spoke like a lady—and she had a baby girl with her, her own child, who was only a few weeks' old. She was on her way to Exeter, but she wanted to know if she might rest a little, as she felt unwell. The young woman was taken ill, and the doctor was sent for, but he was out and not likely to be in for several hours, so a boy was sent on a bicycle to the next village. She suddenly became worse, but, addressing an envelope with some difficulty and enclosing some papers in it, she gave it to the landlord, and insisted that he should post it at once, which he did. The address on the envelope was that of some lawyers in Lincoln's Inn, but Mrs. Carson cannot now remember their name. She died before the doctor from the next village could get to her, having entrusted a small package and the baby to the old woman's daughter, with instructions to take it to a London address, which she also professes to have forgotten, with the message that it was Marguerite's child, and could not help what its mother had done, and would it be too much to ask for the little one to be brought up to love the memory of its mother?"

"What an extraordinary story! Wouldn't the people take the child in?" asked Mrs. Graham, now thoroughly alert, and very keenly interested.

"They didn't have the chance; the kid didn't get as far as London. It got no further than Miss Harland's doorstep, apparently," said Julia Milburn, with a short, callous laugh.



"The parcel proved the child's undoing, for it was found to contain some wonderful jewels, many of them of great value. I think that the landlord must have been something of a crook, for he knew the value of them, and where to get rid of them, apparently. He gave her five hundred pounds for her share, and persuaded her to get rid of the baby, which she did, in a very simple manner. The extraordinary thing was that no enquiries were made about the child, and that the young woman, having no marks of identification about her, and being very poorly dressed, was buried as a pauper. I've no doubt that if a smart detective could be set to work, the mystery would soon be cleared up, but—er——," and Julia Milburn paused, significantly.

"Well?" said Mrs. Graham, after a tense silence, lasting well over a minute.

"I don't want it cleared up; nor do you, if you admit to the truth. I got all my information from Mrs. Carson after I had bribed her to pose as Daisy Harland's mother, and to claim her as her daughter," was the unexpected, amazing reply.

No throb of pity stirred the heart of the woman who was thrice a mother, and who herself had girls within a few years of Daisy's age.

Though there was not the slightest shadow of an excuse for Julia Milburn's vile conduct, it could at least be said for her that she was not a mother, and that she was fighting for the man she loved, as women have done, in their different ways, from the beginning, and will do until the end.

But Mrs. Graham's stake was only a building of brick and stone and to it she was quite willing, nay, eager, to sacrifice a young girl's shining youth, the golden years of her life.

"Tell me more," she said, hoarsely, and two bright red spots appeared in her haggard cheeks, while her eyes glowed as if a little taper had been lighted behind each.

With a deliberation that held in it something fiendishly repulsive, by reason of the garb that she wore, Julia Milburn lighted another cigarette from the one which she tossed into the grate, before she replied.

"There's no need for me to tell you my interest in this affair, is there?" she said, keeping her eyes on the fire, as if she did not care to meet the gaze of the other woman.

"Gerald," murmured Mrs. Graham, with dry lips.

"Exactly."

Julia Milburn nodded.

She added, with a sudden, unexpected blush. "You needn't be afraid of trusting him to me. I'll make something of him once I get him, I promise you. I never should have let him go," she finished, with a note of savage impatience in her rather hoarse, but very attractive voice.

"You would have been very poor, Julia, if this had happened after you had married my boy. You had no money of your own, I believe," Mrs. Graham reminded her, in the tone of one offering a condolence.

"True," assented the young widow. "And Jack wasn't bad to me, really. He's left me everything unconditionally, three thousand a year and the house in London, so Gerald will be free from financial worry. I want him to enter Parliament, and make a name for himself," she concluded, seeing the vision of herself as the wife of a rising politician in the flames.

"If only his ambition were roused, Gerald would make his mark in any calling," said Mrs. Graham, proudly.

"But he is very, very obstinate, and if he suspected an attempt to prevent his marrying Daisy Harland, he would marry her at once, without a penny, and defy us all," she observed, anxiously, after a pause.

"He'll not want to marry a girl with a mother like Lizzie Carson," said Julia Milburn, easily.

But Mrs. Graham did not appear to be so sure. Like most people who are asked to subscribe to a plot not of their own making, she criticised it from every angle.

"Supposing that Daisy refuses to believe that she is the child of such a woman as this—er—Lizzie Carson," she spoke the name with very evident distaste. "And of course she is under no legal obligation to recognise or live with her at all; in fact, though I am not quite sure, I believe that the woman could be prosecuted," added Mrs. Graham, seriously.

"Pshaw!" The exclamation, accompanied by

a contemptuous laugh, sounded ugly as it came from Julia Milburn's lips.

"There are no grounds for a prosecution, as matters stand. Lizzie Carson's story would be that her husband, who had married her as a widow, not knowing that she had a child, refused to let her take it to Canada with them, and she therefore left it with her mother. If anybody is culpable, it is the dead woman," she said, calmly, as if the same eventuality had struck her, and had been provided for.

"Mrs. Horrex, when she was dying, made a statement to me and to the doctor which tallies with facts. He is willing to certify her sanity, and of course the old creature thought that she was speaking the truth. Lizzie Carson is ready to swear that she handed over her baby to her mother on the same night that Miss Harland found her on her doorstep. A clearer simpler story could hardly be told. It does not much matter whether Daisy goes to live with her 'parent' or not—Gerald is going to be invited to Diana Pierman's place for a week, and I, too, shall get myself invited. Lizzie Carson is going to make herself known to Daisy on a Saturday afternoon, when she will not be at school, and Gerald will be with her, and I, of course, will drop in by the purest accident, for a cup of tea. Gerald is on his way home now, isn't he?" she asked, carelessly.

"I am expecting him to-morrow."

Mrs. Graham spoke with a new note in her voice ;



the apathy had departed from it now that there was some prospect of saving Weatherly Towers from the Jews.

"He is only staying one night, and goes to Lady Pierman's place on Wednesday. Is it to be this Saturday?" asked Mrs. Graham, with never a blush of shame for the evil to which she was giving countenance.

Julia Milburn nodded.

"Yes. The sooner, the better. That champion of hers, the navvy person—what is his name?—Martin something—has met with a very serious motor accident, and is not expected to live," she said, carelessly, as she buttoned on a long black kid glove.

"Considering how very active the young man is with his fists, it might be as well for the affecting little meeting to take place whilst he is powerless to interfere," she concluded, her last word coinciding with the fastening of the final button.

She held out a slim, shapely hand, and offered a portion of her cheek for a peck of farewell.

Mrs. Graham delayed the peck, and held the hand for a moment. She raised her bright, but troubled eyes to the dark face, over which the black brimmed hat cast a yet darker shadow.

"And—and what about Weatherly Towers?" she asked, in a voice of painful appeal. "The foreclosure was postponed for three months, and a month of that is almost gone," she said miserably.

"I'll settle that as soon as Gerald's ring is on my finger," was the extremely decided reply.

"But—but your mourning," objected Mrs. Graham, feebly.

"No need for anybody to know. We'll keep it a secret and go abroad for a few months and when we come back the people who would be most shocked if I re-married now will hardly remember the fact that I ever was a widow," said Julia Milburn, with a sarcastic curl of her upper lip.

"That is true," assented Mrs. Graham, but her voice was absent. She was in the future—the future which held Weatherly Towers free from debt, herself its proud, care-free mistress, her son living there after her death, carrying on the Graham line, and possibly—the thought made her a trifle uneasy and caused her to look sharply at the hard, unyielding face of the woman who loved her boy—she might live to see Gerald's sons grow to love the old place as she did.

"My dear, I hope that all will go well. My thoughts will be with you on Saturday," were the words with which she accompanied her kiss of farewell, exactly as if the woman to whom she proffered it had been about to engage on some high and noble enterprise, instead of the calculated, deliberate ruin of a young girl's life.

## CHAPTER XXI.

**D**AISY was putting the finishing touches to a new jumper that she had knitted. It was a warm cherry-coloured affair relieved with black, and with it Daisy was going to wear a smart little black cloth skirt, and a black Tam o'shanter, which would complete a simple, but altogether charming and suitable costume for country wear.

Ailsa was sitting opposite to Daisy, but she had a writing pad on her knee, and from the character of her work, it was quite easy to see that it was a poem; by the rapt expression of her eyes when she lifted them now and then, and the delicate pink flush on her cheeks, it was also palpable that she was not writing a poem that she already knew, but was composing one of her own.

Daisy knitted on, outwardly serene and calm, but inwardly she was filled with the dreadful unrest that had been her portion for over a week, ever since she had made the discovery that had set her whole nature quivering, dancing, daring, and dreaming.

Ailsa Graham was composing a love poem to *him*, to Martin, *her* man, because he had told her, with his own lips, that he loved her, and wanted her,

and if he could not have her, would have no other.

It gave her a sweet, shy thrill when she thought of that, and she longed to shriek at the other girl, "Stop writing your silly little lovesick poems. Martin Eversley loves me—me, not you—and I love him, not your brother. When Martin is better, I am going to him, simply and bravely, and I shall say, "I made a mistake when I told you that I could never love you. I do love you—it took the sight of another woman kissing you to make me realise the fact—but it is not too late. Marry me, and take me with you where you will—to the other side of the world, if you like—I do not mind, so long as I have you."

That was how she felt about Martin Eversley, who had, after all, been moved to the hospital for more skilled attention than they could give him at the cottage, and she exulted in her love with all the white fire of her youth and naturally ardent temperament.

She longed for Martin to get well. They had had to perform an operation on his brain, which had been quite successful, but precluded the possibility of visitors for a considerable time.

"I think it is a cruel shame not to allow us even to see Mr. Eversley. We could not hurt him, if we did not speak, and if the opinion of leading psychologists goes for anything, the presence of those who really wished him well would help him, not harm him," Ailsa declared, warmly, when Daisy repeated what the doctor had told her.



"All the same, I think that the doctor had better be allowed his own way," replied Daisy, a little coldly.

She had tried to conquer the feeling, telling herself that it was unworthy, and unreasonable, for, if she could fall so violently in love with Martin, was it to be wondered at that another girl fell in love with exactly the same qualities, the same man?

But love never reasons, it only loves, and though Daisy succeeded in calming her head, she could not control her heart, and stifle the wild, unreasoning emotion that made her as jealous as a squaw, and as proud as a prehistoric cave woman. Not because she was in the least afraid that Ailsa would get him, but because she desired Martin, Daisy was unable to feel as friendly towards her now as in the past.

But Ailsa, her heart aflame, her whole being absorbed by love, did not notice anything amiss. Daisy was engaged to her brother and she felt happily secure in the fact. Martin loved Daisy, but he could be taught to forget. Other men forgot, Ailsa told herself, passionately, forgetting to apply the same principle to herself, like the majority of love-blinded girls. That a man can be taught to forget another girl seems quite feasible, as well as right, but that he could ever forget oneself in the same easy, complacent fashion never, apparently, occurs to those girls who reason in this way.

"Darling, you have got your wish with regard

to Martin Eversley. I love him with every ounce of feeling in a heart that has previously slept. I fear him—he is so strong, exactly like a rock that endures for ever—and I seem like a little wave just caressing him softly, but I love him, and he loves me. He told me so more than once, and when he recovers from the accident I told you about in my last letter, I am going to tell him of the change that has come over me. Auntie, darling, it is difficult to put all this into words; if you were here, I would just lay my head in your lap and you would stroke my hair, and I feel quite sure that there would be no need to say anything, for you would understand without being told. Perhaps,—how I wish that you were here, dear—if Martin asks me to marry him, I shall say “Yes,” and then we’ll try and come out to you, together. Wouldn’t that be lovely? Perhaps I’ll let him fight just one more match to get the money—he gets a thousand pounds when he fights, and of course he would win, and he says that the blows struck in the ring do not really hurt at all, because boxing is such a healthy, exciting sport.”

That was the innocently ignorant sentence with which Daisy closed her letter to Miss Harland, one which would have brought a smile to Martin’s face if he could have read it, but, as so often happens in a feminine letter, the postscript was of great importance.

Daisy’s footnote ran :—“ I have not told Gerald yet, and I still have his ring, but of course I do

not wear it. He is still in the South of France, but is coming back this week, and is to spend a few days at Lady Diana Pierman's, so I expect that I shall see a lot of him. I shall hate telling him, but he would not want to marry a girl whose heart was given to another man and, somehow, I do not think that he will be so terribly upset."

If Ailsa could have seen the letter before it was despatched to Egypt, she would have been too consumed with jealousy to have written poems; as it was, when she had a thought to spare, it was to wonder rather contemptuously how Daisy could be so placid and unhurried in every way when she was expecting the arrival of the man she loved.

As usual, she thought her own capacity for love quite unique. Few natures could yield themselves so utterly and entirely to love as hers, she told herself, proudly.

"Gerald will be here to tea, will he not?" said Ailsa, dreamily, at length, having finished correcting the last line of her poem.

"Yes, he is due at five, and after tea we are going for a walk," said Daisy, quietly, casting off the last stitch of her jumper.

"I shall go up and enquire for Martin," said Ailsa, letting her voice linger lovingly over his name; she had lately taken to calling him by his Christian name, and Daisy wondered what he would think of it when he got better.

She took no apparent notice of Ailsa's remark, but, with a glance at the clock, flung her new jumper

over her arm and departed upstairs to put it on.

The clock was striking five when she gave the final pat to her hair and came downstairs.

As she reached the bottom stair, there was a knock at the door, and Daisy herself opened it.

Two figures stood there in the autumn twilight, a man and a woman.

It was easy to recognise Gerald, but who—who was with him?

The young girl peered closely at the black, heavily veiled figure. Then Julia Milburn spoke, in honeyed tones, somewhat overdone, that were insincere to the point of insult.

"Dear Miss Harland, I *do* hope that you won't consider me a very intrusive, horrible person, but I met Gerald out for a walk, and there was so much for us to talk about that I found myself on the doorstep before I knew where we were. Gerald thought—er—"

Julia Milburn hesitated the fraction of a second; it was a distinctly huffed, uncompromising look that her former sweetheart shot at her from his lowered eyelids.

But, remembering her purpose, Julia Milburn proceeded with her polite lies.

"He thought, as it is so near tea time, that I might come in and join you," she finished, with a sweet smile that would have utterly disarmed a stranger.

"Oh, certainly. We shall be delighted if you will join us," said Daisy, with more warmth than



Gerald expected of her, as she stood aside, a slim little figure in black and scarlet, so youthfully fresh and lovely, so eminently desirable. She went to Gerald Graham's head, anew; he had seen nothing like Daisy in all his travels, but he had met and knew dozens of Julia Milburn's type.

For a few moments they stood together on the hearthrug of the little chintz parlour; Daisy, the girl who could quicken his heartbeats, even under the most trying circumstances, and the young widow with whom he had once fancied himself in love.

"She looks as if all the knowledge that the world contains is held in those eyes, but Daisy looks as innocent as a child and as wonderfully fair," he thought, with a very genuine feeling of warmth round his heart.

If Julia Milburn had been either a little wiser, or a trifle less sure of herself, she would not have placed herself in such close proximity to the girl whose youth and freshness she could never hope to emulate.

Gerald Graham greeted his sister with a careless brush of his moustache on her cheek, and wondered vaguely what had happened to make her seem so vital, so different from the cold, unapproachable creature that he had always known.

Naturally, he put the change down to the benefit which she had derived from association with his sweetheart.

"She'll probably get married, now that she

doesn't freeze fellows quite so much," he thought, approvingly.

Daisy, looking very charming, did the honours of the table, and while she poured out tea and pressed eatables on her guests, her glance wandered repeatedly to Gerald, who sat by Julia Milburn, and she tried to get some comfort from the fact, of which she kept continually assuring herself, that they made a fine couple, and when her period of mourning was over, she would make Gerald a much more suitable wife than herself. It is always easy to dispose of what has ceased to attract oneself!

Julia Milburn asked permission to smoke, and did so. Daisy herself did not smoke, and, somehow, she could not repress an inward shudder at the sight of a woman recently bereaved blowing rings of smoke through her nose, and joking as if she had not recently passed through a most solemn time.

The clock struck six, but the uninvited guest showed no disposition to leave.

Tea had been quite a pleasant meal, but there was now a feeling of an anti-climax.

Conversation was no longer easy, nor laughter spontaneous; there were frequent pauses and long spells of silence.

In the midst of one of the pauses Mrs. Oakley came into the room.

"There's a woman to see you, Miss Daisy, who says she's come all the way from London, and can't go back till she's had a talk along with you. She

wants to see you private, she says," she added, with a touch of asperity in her tones, and a look at Gerald Graham as if to say "Don't let her do anything of the kind."

At least, that was how the glance was interpreted.

"Shall I see her for you, darling?" he said, with a proprietary readiness, rising to his feet as he spoke.

"Why not let her come in here?"

The suggestion came from Julia Milburn.

Nobody noticed that the fingers which held the long, jewelled cigarette holder were trembling, nor that all the colour had drained away from her face, leaving it ghastly white. That was because she bowed her head, so that her face could not be seen as she flicked an imaginary crumb off her lap.

Now that her scheme was about to fructify, she felt afraid, desperately afraid.

There seemed nothing against the idea.

"Show her in here, please, Mrs. Oakley," said Daisy.

## CHAPTER XXII

**A** LITTLE, shrinking, pale-faced figure in black entered the room.  
Lizzie Carson was dressed for her part ; nothing had been left to chance.

Once the woman may have been pretty, in a common, flashy fashion ; there were still faint traces of it in the small, straight nose, rather nicely shaped mouth, and arching brows.

Her age could not have been more than forty-two, and she hardly looked that, but everything about her was marred by the suggestion of drink—her skin showed traces of blotches, her cheeks, which should have been round and firm, were slightly pendulous, and, to Julia Milburn's fierce disgust—for she had warned the woman—her breath smelled faintly of whisky.

There was too much of a family likeness between Ailsa and her brother for Lizzie Carson to make a mistake.

She fixed her mournful eyes on Daisy, and her voice quivered as she said, " Could I speak to you for a few minutes, alone, please ? "

" Whatever you have to say to Miss Harland can be said before us. She is engaged to me, and these two ladies are her friends," said Gerald



Graham, curtly, from his seat beside Julia Milburn.

Lizzie Carson looked uncertainly around the room ; her face moved pitifully, and then, taking a step towards Daisy, she held out her arms, and made a declaration which could not have been more startling to all but one member of the group if a bomb had been suddenly flung into their midst.

"I am your mother, child. I'm free at last to come and tell you," were her words.

Sheer amazement produced a silence under which ran a tense current of feeling.

Daisy sank, trembling, into an armchair, her face white and her eyes a little wild. What was the woman saying ?

"I left you with your grannie, Mrs. Horrex that's just dead, one night twenty years ago, and told her to put you on the steps of the Union ; but she left you in Miss Harland's front garden, instead, and she's brought you up like a lady,—but you are mine, for all that."

The words scarcely penetrated to Daisy's consciousness ; she was possessed of an irresistible desire to laugh at a funny little black bugle on the woman's bonnet ; incipient hysteria, of course.

Ailsa Graham's face lost some of the warm, new beauty that it had gained since Martin Eversley had come into her life ; it wore the cold, proud, reserved expression that it generally wore in the old days, especially to those who were considered her "inferiors."

Her brother was the first to recover ; possibly

the faint odour of spirits, which his quick smell detected, had something to do with it.

"If you have only come to see Miss Harland in order to annoy her with your ridiculous stories, the sooner you leave the better. How far are we from the police station, Ailsa?" he asked pointedly, turning to his sister.

"I'm her mother, anyhow, whether you send for the police or not," returned Lizzie Carson sullenly.

"What proof have you?"

The question was rapped out in hard, somewhat bullying tones.

"Listen to me, all of you."

Julia Milburn's voice had regained its normal clear, imperious tones.

Daisy, Ailsa and Gerald all looked at her in surprise; the little woman in rusty black looked at the floor.

"This woman's story is quite true, so far as the evidence of a dying woman, taken on oath, in front of the doctor and myself, can be trusted," said Julia Milburn, slowly, fingering, but not lighting, the inevitable cigarette.

The three faces turned towards her all expressed blank dismay.

"What does it all mean? Oh, please tell me," said Daisy, piteously.

She had so often dreamed of her mother, wondering what tragedy lay behind her abandonment

of her baby, and always she was young and beautiful, though infinitely sad.

Miss Harland, with a large-mindedness sometimes found, but never excelled, in women, had always done her best to dispel any thought of bitterness in the heart of her adopted child against the mother she had never known, for she, too, thought that there must have been some tragedy behind such a singularly beautiful little foundling as Daisy.

When she had discovered her love for Martin Eversley, her first thought had been "If only I had a mother to tell it to, like other girls," but she had checked herself sternly, thinking that even such a natural, innocent wish was hardly loyal to Miss Harland, who had given her everything, even her own name.

And now—this !

Daisy looked at the coarse, thickened features, at the fat hands which bulged beneath cheap cotton gloves, and a sob rose in her throat ; she would not meet the eyes of the woman who claimed to be her mother.

Instead, she fixed her own on Julia's Milburn's cold, handsome face, and compelled herself to listen to what was passing between her and Gerald.

"Tell us all you know, Julia, and quickly. Why did you not tell Daisy before ?" he asked searchingly.

The widow's gaze never faltered.

"That was one of my reasons for coming in to-night," she lied.

"Mrs. Horrex only died the other day, and Dr. Browne, who attended her, and who heard the story, asked me to keep silent about it until he should be able to see Daisy—he is ill with gout at present," she said easily.

It sounded quite plausible, and a cold, sick feeling began to take possession of Daisy.

She stole a glance at her "mother," and decided that she hated her, and therefore could not possibly be her daughter.

"Well?" asked Gerald Graham, abruptly, almost rudely.

"My dear boy, it's no use glaring at me as if I had left Daisy on a doorstep—or was it in a garden?—twenty years ago!" said Julia Milburn, irritably, not liking the look in her former sweetheart's eyes.

"I'm sorry, Julia. But you can understand how I feel," apologised Gerald Graham.

"If you like to step round to Dr. Browne's, and take Mrs. Carson with you, he'll verify all that I have told you," said Julia, telling them exactly the same story as she had told Mrs. Graham a few days ago.

At the conclusion of the recital Daisy was sitting, dry-eyed, mute, and heart-sick, in an armchair, looking as if all the sorrows that the world contained had suddenly been poured into her young life; Ailsa had unconsciously edged nearer to her brother, who stood, hands in pocket, mouth pursed into a whistle, looking at Lizzie Carson as if she had been some strange freak of Nature.



Julia Milburn's whole attention was taken up in watching Gerald Graham's face, trying to penetrate to the brain beyond.

" Jim Carson, he courted me as a widow without children, and when we was going to Canada, I ups and tells him about little Marguerite, but he never could bide the sight of children, and he wouldn't give me any money to help keep her, and neither would he let me take her with me. If I'd been the right sort, 'stead of a soft, silly fool, I'd have stood up to him and seen him to Jericho 'fore I'd leave my kid to the mercy of the world an' go with him to Canada."

There seemed to be real feeling in the hoarse, common voice; either the woman was a born actress, or else she really did feel what she said.

As a matter of fact, Lizzie Carson had not been a widow long enough to forget the failings of her departed spouse, and when she thought of her very real sufferings she could speak with true feeling; there was no need for acting.

" Well, what did you do, then? "

Gerald Graham's voice was like a lash—cold, cruel, and contemptuous. Such people as Lizzie Carson and the class she represented did not exist for him; they were not part of the scheme of things, so far as he was concerned.

" You 'eard what the lady told yer, didn't yer? " said Daisy's " mother," sullenly resentful.

If she was getting a good figure for her trouble,

she hadn't come there to be treated as if she was dirt, she told herself, angrily.

"I think, perhaps, that it would be as well to step round to Doctor Browne," said Gerald Graham, wearily, at length. "You, Julia, had better come, but it would be better for you, Daisy, to remain behind," he said, turning gently towards the icy little figure who sat like a carved statue in the chintz-covered armchair.

Daisy was galvanised into instant, vivid life.

"Oh, no, no! I'll come, too!" she cried, making feverish haste to get on her outdoor clothes.

Nobody said her nay; everybody felt exceedingly sorry for her,—everybody that is, except the creature who had schemed to bring about the scene which had just taken place.

They left Ailsa in the sitting room, and Gerald Graham took the responsibility of asking Daisy's "mother" to wait in the kitchen.

Somehow, in spite of Julia Milburn's statement, which he had to accept as true, Gerald Graham could not believe that Daisy was the child of such a woman as Lizzie Carson.

"Couldn't the old woman have been doting, doctor?" he asked, when, fifteen minutes later, the trio were admitted to his bedroom, where he was laid up with gout.

"No, she was remarkably clear-headed at the last, I am bound to say," was the discouraging reply.

"And the woman herself—her daughter—admits

the whole thing. Of course, Miss Daisy won't be so foolish as to live with a mother who could calmly abandon her to the care of strangers, and then claim her at twenty years of age. I should send the woman about her business," finished the old doctor, testily.

His gout gave him a painful twinge, and he gave his visitors an unmistakable hint that their room would be preferable to their company.

They went out into the lane together, a silent group with one thought between them.

Suddenly, Daisy gave a tug at her neck, and the next instant something bright and shining was in her hand. There was the shimmer of diamonds in the moonlight as she passed whatever it was that she held across to Gerald Graham.

"What's this?" said the man, stopping short in his surprise.

In his hand he held Daisy's engagement ring.

"Take it back, please," she said, in a low voice. "If this story of my parentage is true—and it appears to be—you will not want to possess a mother-in-law like Lizzie Carson."

The name came out with difficulty.

Gerald Graham's reply was as unexpected to both women as it was unhesitating and decided.

"If your mother happened to be fifty Lizzie Carsons rolled into one, I would still count it the greatest privilege in my life to marry you, Daisy," he said, earnestly.

Julia Milburn was powerless to restrain the

exclamation which rose to her lips, as she stopped short in the middle of the moon-silvered lane and peered closely into Gerald Graham's face.

"*What!*" she said, again, as if her ears had been playing her a trick.

Daisy felt herself growing hot all over, with mingled shame and fury. Somehow, she felt impelled to defend the woman who claimed to be her mother, and, even in the midst of the emotional storm which swept her, it struck her that her wish to shield this woman from the cruel, malicious sneers of Julia Milburn, must indicate some natural tie between them.

In the days that followed, the desire to shield and help Lizzie Carson to a purer, sweeter mode of life became an intense longing on Daisy's part, and she attributed it to the law of Nature that no child, however long parted from the one who gave it birth, can ever be wholly and entirely indifferent.

What Daisy forgot,—or rather, what she did not know—was that her very upbringing by such a character as Miss Harland, and her work amongst little children, allied to a naturally sweet disposition, endowed her with that gracious kindness and pity for the faults and frailties of others which set her amongst the strong and splendid of the earth.

If Daisy had heard Julia Milburn adopt the same tone in speaking of anybody else, she would have felt just as indignant; as if the woman had been some loathsome, unclean beast, she told herself, furiously.



There was a curious, icy tone in the clear young voice, and a proud little air of dignity which never could have come from such forbears as Lizzie Carson and her kind, when Daisy, looking straight at the other woman, spoke.

"I think," she said, very slowly and distinctly, "that this is a purely personal matter between Mr. Graham and myself. I would also thank you to remember that I have accepted the fact of my parentage, and I greatly resent my mother," Daisy's voice faltered for a second, as if the word choked her to let it pass her lips. But she went on, bravely and calmly with the same little cold smile playing around her lips, "I greatly resent my mother being spoken of in that tone, as everything concerning her will affect me and nobody else. Would you mind if we went back to the house by another way?" finished Daisy, giving the experienced Society woman her dismissal as completely and coolly as if she had been a young Princess.

Julia Milburn made some retort which was inaudible, owing to the fact that her voice was so choked with anger that she could not articulate, but she hurried away, her slim black shape, with the long widow's veil being quickly swallowed up in the shadows.

"Serve her jolly well right!" was Gerald Graham's first far from complimentary remark when he thought that his former sweetheart was well out of hearing.

As a matter of fact, the hopeful Julia had not got nearly so far as he imagined, and she overheard every word.

Her slender form became rigid with the intensity of her hatred ; hardly knowing what she did, she stretched out a black gloved hand and clawed savagely at space, doubtless thinking how sweet it would have been if she could have indulged her feline inclinations by clawing at Daisy's face instead of empty air.

" I wish killing was not murder ! " she muttered, thickly, at length.

Meanwhile, Daisy had led the way to a side path which ran through the very field where she had been when Gerald Graham had first seen her, teaching a song to a class of little children, standing amidst the corn, herself looking like a fragrant summer rose.

He recognized the field by the hedge ; yes, there was the very gap over which he had peered, attracted by the sound of the children's singing.

Memory surged back, bringing with it all the freshness of his early passion for the girl at his side.

It was quite true that no girl had ever affected him like Daisy Harland ; because of her he was a better man, though he would have felt deeply ashamed to have confessed the efforts that he had been making to throw off the old idle, pleasure-loving habits, so that he could, for Daisy's sake, become a worker.

Suddenly, at the entrance to the field, he stopped,

and, pulling Daisy towards him, held her to him in a tight passionate embrace, while he rained kisses down upon the upturned face, which Daisy tried to turn away, but could not.

"It was here, in this field, that I first saw you," said Gerald Graham, in a low voice, vibrant with feeling, punctuating his words with more kisses.

Somehow, amidst the confused welter of thought with which her brain was whirling, Daisy managed to evolve one sentence which she wished to utter, but she had no chance, with those eager arms holding her so tightly, and her lips being kissed over and over again.

"And it is here that we must part," were the words that she wanted to say, but could not.

"Did you think, little jewel, my pearl amongst women, that I would give you up because of that poor creature who claims to be your mother?" he asked fondly.

Then he added something which touched Daisy very deeply, and brought home very forcibly to her consciousness the fact that there was a good deal of gold in Gerald Graham's make-up.

"If the woman is your mother, Daisy,—and really, though I don't exactly relish the thought, I think, with you, that she must be—it's up to us to do something for her and look after her, though she's done precious little for you, I must say. Still, I've got the offer of a good appointment which will bring in seven hundred a year, and as

I've got a five years' agreement I think we can risk getting married, don't you?"

He gave a loving little squeeze to the soft arm within his hand, and Daisy felt suddenly ashamed, hating the task before her of telling this man, whom she had once thought that she loved, the truth, which was that she had never loved him at all.

More than ever she now knew this to be true. A few short weeks ago she would have thrilled with ecstasy at the sound of Gerald's voice, at the feeling of being held within his arms, at the touch of his lips upon her own; but now—such is the departure of joy when love is but a counterfeit of the great passion—there was no thrill, only a feeling of acute distress, and a great unspeakable ache at her heart.

"Listen to me, Gerald," she said, with a pretty little air of command that made the man who listened more hopelessly than ever her slave. "It isn't only because of mother that I want to break off our engagement," she said, speaking quickly, as if she wanted to get over what she had to say with the minimum of delay.

Gerald Graham looked at her sharply, and his hand fell suddenly upon her shoulder. Perhaps instinct, mingled with a lover's natural jealousy, led him to guess the truth.

"Then what is the reason? Is it somebody else?" he asked, very quietly, but it was evident that he was holding himself well in control.



Daisy nodded ; she could not trust herself to speak.

There was a miserable silence for a few moments between the young couple ; some cows, left late at the grazing, came close to them, and looked in soft-eyed wonder as they passed.

Daisy was struggling fiercely for the mastery over a hard lump in her throat, and she felt afraid of the tears that she knew were in her eyes.

She might have succeeded in retaining her self-control if the moon had not suddenly shone out from behind a massed bank of clouds, and shown her Gerald Graham's face, which was white and wretchedly miserable.

The slender barrier between herself and her emotion was torn down by that one glance. The next moment she was sobbing as if her heart would break.

" I—I feel s—so guilty, Gerald," she said, at length, when he had done his best to soothe and quiet her. " Although," she added, in a tone of sad conviction, " I should have felt much more guilty if I had married you, knowing that I could never love you—that my heart was with someone else all the time. But you have behaved so splendidly about mother, and your willingness not to let such a thing stand in the way of our marriage is something that I shall never forget."

" Who is the man ? Is it Martin Eversley ? "

The words were rapped out sharply ; Gerald Graham appeared not to have heard Daisy's appreciation of himself.

A faint, almost inarticulate "Yes" came from Daisy, accompanied by a decided movement of her head which told the man more than her words.

"When did he propose to you? Behind my back, of course." His voice was very bitter.

"No, he didn't do anything of the kind, Gerald," said Daisy, sadly, "he only told me once that he loved me, and I was so angry with him that Auntie made me apologise to him. He said, then, that he was not well, and had lost grip of himself, or he would not have spoken. I gave him to understand very definitely that I did not want him, and he still thinks that. It was only when . . ."

Daisy pulled herself up; she was about to say, "It was only when I saw your sister on her knees beside him, kissing him and calling him sweet, endearing names, that I realised what Love really meant, all that it is, all that it can be."

She was about to say this, but something held her back; instead, she said, "It is only since he has been ill that I have learned to love Martin Eversley. I thought that he might have forgotten his love for me, but in his delirium his only thought was for me, and my name, so the nurses tell me, is for ever on his lips. Oh, Gerald," coming closer to the tall, uncompromisingly stiff figure, which looked so very big in the moonlight, "please believe that I'm very, very sorry, and that I wouldn't have become engaged to you if I could have foreseen all this. You will take this back, now, won't you?" she finished, holding up the sparkling

diamond ring which she was offering to him for the second time that evening.

Gerald Graham pushed it aside with an impatient movement.

"I don't want it, child. What should I do with it? I gave it to you—I didn't lend it, do what you like with it. I'll tell you this, though," and he held Daisy by both shoulders and peered down deeply into her eyes, "You may consider yourself free, but I won't. I'll never give you up until I see you with a wedding ring on your finger. I wish I'd let Eversley stay where he was born—on the muck-pile," he finished, savagely.

Daisy started to walk away in the direction of the cottage; her heart was one huge, devastating ache; she felt incapable of thought or feeling. Everything seemed tangled up into an inexplicably knotted skein, and she felt afraid of so many things. There was her mother, Gerald Graham, his sister, Julia Milburn, Mrs. Graham—all disturbing forces that had come into her life during the last year. And Martin Eversley—the most disturbing force of them all—he had torn through the sunny nothingness of her days like a red-hot blizzard!

No word passed between them until the cottage was reached.

"Thanks, I don't think I'll come in," said Gerald Graham, shortly, as he opened the white wooden gate.

But his voice carried on the still night air to the

occupants of the sitting room, and his sister's clear, cold voice came through the garden.

"Please do come in, Gerald, because Julia hasn't anyone to see her back, and she's frightened, so you'd better both go together."

An expression of annoyance came from Gerald Graham's lips, and it was repeated in his face, but there was no help for it, as both he and his former sweetheart were staying at the same house, so he passed into the cottage, after Daisy, who had been called into the parlour by Julia Milburn as she was about to go straight upstairs.

"Heavens! What brutes women can be to each other!" muttered the man who loved Daisy Harland as he never had and never would love another girl.

"Your mother left word that she was staying with her sister in the village, and that she will not trouble you again, but will go back to London in a day or two," were the words that he overheard, delivered in a voice which held so much venom that it gave rise to the expression of opinion on Gerald Graham's part—a perfectly true one, by the way—that there is nobody quite so cruel to a woman as another of her own sex.

As she stood in the little pool of light that the lamp made, Daisy's piteous face, with the red-rimmed eyes and tear-stained cheeks, should have melted the hardest heart.

At that moment, Ailsa felt a faint stirring of pity for her, but there would certainly not have



been a shred of that most beautiful emotion if she had overheard the conversation which had just taken place between Daisy and her brother.

The three were alone in the little parlour, the walls of which could tell so movingly human a story if only they could speak; Daisy had gone upstairs.

The air was heavy with mystery and misery; and a consciousness of both emotions was conveyed to all, even to Ailsa, who had, from the first, endeavoured to detach herself from the whole unpleasant business.

"Daisy is very upset by the appearance of her mother, but I can't see that she need be so fearfully tragic about it. It isn't as if Miss Harland had led her to believe that she was a relation. She has always known that she was just a nameless waif, taken in out of pity."

It was Ailsa who spoke. What she said was perfectly correct, but it was so easy for her to be trite and a little impatient—Lizzie Carson had not claimed *her* as a daughter.

Her brother turned savagely upon her, and told her as much, adding, in a voice that could do no other than convince by reason of its simple earnestness, "If she'd have me, I'd marry her to-morrow, and chance the whole crowd of undesirable relations that she may, for all I know, possess."

Ailsa's voice broke in, and there was a note of horror mingled with the amazement which it held.

"You don't mean to say that she's given you up of her own accord, and thrown away her only chance of bettering her position?" said the girl, opening her china blue eyes to their widest extent.

To her extremely limited mind, an action such as this was unthinkable.

Gerald Graham bit his under lip, and his voice grew so gruff that it eventually became little more than a growl as he replied, "None of you have ever had the slightest sympathy for the girl; if you had, you would have known that to think of others before herself would be the very thing that she would do. However, it may interest you to know that she intended to break off our engagement in any case; she's in love with Martin Eversley, it seems," and as he spoke Martin's name, Gerald Graham's fine eyes flashed; the thin veneer of polish and restraint that was his inheritance from a long line of aristocratic forbears was completely broken through and engulfed in the stronger, more natural law which enacts that in matters of love, all men shall be equals in the fight.

Julia Milburn was watching her former lover closely from beneath her long, drooping lashes. Her face was calm, but her heart was an inferno of love, hatred, and malice intermingled until her whole being writhed.

Never, even in the first mad, delirious days of a love which only she wanted to revive, had Gerald ever looked like that for her!

Both she and Gerald Graham were too intensely taken up with themselves to notice Ailsa.

She had gone so white that she looked as if she must faint; but she managed to conquer herself until, slipping almost unnoticed from the parlour, she reached the room which had formerly been used as a study, but which now was her own bedroom.

"If only I could kill either her or myself!" sobbed the distraught, almost insane girl, as she pressed her hands to her ears in order to shut out the sound of Daisy moving about in the next room.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**D**AISY took the letter from the postman at the garden gate, and she looked at the typewritten, foolscap envelope with a nervous eye and a fluttering at her heart.

Her whole future hung on that letter, which represented one of the fiercest battles that a young, inexperienced girl had ever fought, alone, unaided, and un comforted even by the knowledge that her self-sacrifice would be appreciated.

If Miss Harland, rapidly recovering her health in sunny Egypt, could have been near to have witnessed the silent battle between desire and duty which raged for days in Daisy's heart, and transformed her into a pale little shadow of her former self, she would have felt proud of the child, who was by every right, except that of actual kinship, hers, and hers alone.

Next to love, the greatest thing in the whole world, the inspiration of life, the noblest of all words, is Duty.

"Honour thy father and thy mother," according to the meaning which Daisy had learned as a little girl at her foster-mother's knee, meant something more than a mere outward expression of respect for one's parents. It meant helpfulness to the very



last degree of one's power to help, recognition, at whatever cost, of the tie of blood, even if it involved pain and sorrow.

"Auntie, if my mother is alive and one day wanted me, I shouldn't have to leave you, should I? You see, I love you, and I don't even know her, and," Daisy had added, with childish emphasis, "I don't want to know her, either."

She was about twelve at the time, just of an age to understand what it meant not to know whether or not her mother lived.

It was then that Miss Harland had explained to her what "honouring" meant.

"All noble things are difficult, and if duty were always easy, then there would be no glory in conquest. If your mother ever came to claim you, Daisy, I should say "Go"; though I think that it would break my heart to lose you, now."

The tears had stood in Miss Harland's eyes at the mere thought, but in her heart she strongly doubted that the necessity would ever arise for parting with her beloved foster child.

Daisy remembered it all so well, and the recollection swayed the balance in favour of Lizzie Carson in the battle between desire and duty.

Her whole soul, her whole being ached with longing to confess her love to Martin.

But how could she help her mother with her personal influence, if she married? She might be able to help her with money, but that would be no

use, for it would only go to enrich the landlord of the nearest public house.

The young girl, who had always lived such a white, sheltered life, who was absolutely unacquainted with the vice that so often rubs shoulders with virtue in a great city, shuddered as she thought of the misery that would be hers if she married Martin, to know that her mother was drinking herself to death, descending lower and lower in the social scale until she became an utter outcast, a pariah amongst all decent, respectable people.

Conscience pointed a white, unrelenting finger to the grey path of Duty, and, with a feeling that she was tearing her heart from her body with her own fingers, Daisy presented herself before the governors of the school, and told them that she wished to hand in her resignation, as she had a desire to go and teach in a London school.

Not a member of the school council but felt deeply sorry for the bright young girl who had grown up, as sweet and modest as her name-flower, amongst them all, and there was a dim moisture in more than one pair of eyes as each member shook hands and wished Daisy good luck.

"A fine girl, and Lizzie Carson will get the benefit of all that Miss Harland has done for her! Why couldn't old Mrs. Horrex keep her mouth shut to the last?"

This was the view of the whole village, but, if those who reviled Lizzie Carson had only known it, she would far rather that Daisy stopped where

she was, though, after coming forward to claim her, she could hardly refuse to let the girl have her way in the matter.

She had tried to dissuade Daisy, for, just as nobody on earth is utterly good, so nobody is entirely bad, and though Lizzie Carson was almost everything that she should not have been—dirty, a drunkard, and quite willing to do what she called “a safe job”—which meant violating the law for a consideration—so long as she was not found out—yet even she had her feelings, as a mother, and if Daisy came to live with her, then Kate, her own daughter just the same age, who worked in a margarine factory, would have to disappear, and only come to see her when Daisy was not about.

It would also mean moving away to a neighbourhood where she was not known, or, she told herself, some kind “friend” would be more than sure to “give her away.”

She felt afraid of Daisy; she was not of her world. Her beauty and quiet charm, and well-bred graciousness to everybody, even to herself, awed the rough, uncultivated woman, and made her feel vaguely uncomfortable.

When Daisy had used the word “mother” to her for the first time, a blush had actually stained the poor creature’s face a dull red.

“I don’t want you to demean yourself coming to live with me, M—” Lizzie Carson corrected herself; she had nearly called Daisy “Miss” by instinct.

"I don't want you to give up being genteel like you are. Come up and see me sometimes," she suggested, as a brilliant idea occurred to her.

But Daisy shook her dark gold head with the quiet obstinacy that usually forms part of a gentle, outwardly yielding personality.

"No, mother. I'd rather come to live with you, and take my proper place as your daughter, and share your life. It is only right that I should devote my earnings to making you more comfortable, and I mean to try. Did—did my father leave you quite unprovided for?" said Daisy, very gently, as it seemed more like prying into a stranger's affairs than asking a necessary question of her own mother.

Lizzie Carson laughed—a short, unpleasant laugh that grated on the ear.

She had hated the memory of the bully who had rendered the best years of her life so utterly miserable.

"'Im leave me anything? 'E put all he could get down 'is neck—an' more besides," she added, darkly, alluding to the frequent little spells that her departed lord had spent in prison. Fortunately, the meaning was lost upon Daisy, but the revealing of the fact that her mother had no money, and earned a precarious living by cleaning offices, finally decided Daisy.

Lady Diana Pierman had used her influence to get her a very good post in a London school, and the letter in Daisy's hand was from the London County Council; when she opened it she would know



whether or not she was the successful candidate for the post of teacher of English and elementary French at a night school.

It would be hard work, teaching every night, except Saturday, after day school was done, but it would be necessary, for life in London was a very different thing from life in a little Devon village.

Upstairs in her own room, Daisy opened the letter. She was successful ; she had got the post. She was to start on Monday ; as the students had enrolled the previous Friday.

To-morrow was Saturday. This had been her last day at the Lynton village school.

Some of the older children had cried and given her little keepsakes, and in her purse was a cheque, which was the very useful form that the governors' gift had taken, while she held in her hand a fountain pen, the joint present of the teachers.

All her things were packed ; to-morrow she would leave the little cottage which had never been so dear, so beautiful, as now.

Ailsa had said goodbye with the others at the school ; she was going to spend the week-end with her mother, she said. In reality, she was going to spend it with Lady Pierman, whose guest Julia Milburn still was ; her brother had gone home the same night that Daisy had admitted her love for Martin.

Their common desire for the love of men who had no love to give drew Ailsa and Julia Milburn together ; the latter had her luxurious car with her,

and after school hours she took Ailsa for long drives through the beautiful country, just now aglow with the wonderful crimson leaves of autumn.

"It will really be a very good thing for Gerald, once he has got over it, that his marriage with Daisy did not come off. Just think of the tragedy of a mother-in-law like Mrs. Carson," and Julia Milburn gave a swift side-glance at what she could see of the cold, impassive face, wrapped in a heavy fur, at her side.

Ailsa made what seemed to her a very curious remark.

"Don't you think that all this bother about only marrying those of one's own class is a lot of rot—just something invented by rich people to protect their own interests? In the war, the duke found that he was startlingly like the dustman, except that he was not so care-free and cheery. For my part, if I loved a man, I'd go to him in spite of everybody and everything, even if he pushed a coster's barrow for a living."

There was such a thrill in her usually rather bored voice, and her eyes gleamed such a bright blue above the fur which enveloped her chin that Julia Milburn wondered what had come over the girl.

"Whatever would poor Mrs. Graham say to these awful Socialistic ideas of yours?" she contented herself by saying.

She and Ailsa were out driving on the morning of Daisy's departure for London. They had seen the carrier's cart taking to the station the two large

trunks containing all the treasures which Daisy had collected throughout her life.

They did not doubt that she followed in a trap with Mr. and Mrs. Oakley and perhaps a couple of friends to see her off at the station. At any rate, from their clean pinafores and collars, shining faces and bunches of garden flowers, it was quite evident that the children expected her to come into sight very soon.

From the lane into which Julia Milburn backed the car, Ailsa heard the snort of the train as it started on its journey to London.

Relief was writ large in the faces of both occupants of the car ; in their exuberance they became effusively friendly towards each other, after the manner of women in such a similar situation.

" Let me tuck the rug closer around you, darling. You'll be catching cold," said Julia Milburn, largely offering a more than generous share of the fur motor rug.

" No, thanks, dear. I won't trouble you, really. As a matter of fact," Ailsa tried to speak carelessly, but her eager voice betrayed her. " I was just going to ask you to drop me here. I have a few calls to make on scholars' parents. I'll be back in good time for lunch," she said, finishing her sentence quickly, as if anxious to wipe off the impression created by the first portion of it.

But it was not in the direction of the village that Ailsa bent her steps when she was free to choose her own road.

She made for the local hospital, which stood on the outskirts, on a hill.

A telephone enquiry early in the morning had made the fact known to her that Martin had recovered consciousness, and that, though nothing was definitely promised, possibly he could be seen for a few minutes at twelve o'clock, after the doctor had been.

The bare possibility of seeing him lent wings to Ailsa's feet, and set the red flags waving in her cheeks.

She sped up the long drive to the porch, which was flanked on both sides by tall evergreens, but a cry escaped her lips when, on skirting the bushes, she came face to face with—Daisy !

Astonishment made Daisy shape her red mouth into a little round " Oh," and her grey eyes suddenly became flecked with a deeper hue, as was their way when she was labouring under deep emotion.

A sudden, hot flaming jealousy filled her heart in every corner ; she felt that she hated this calm-eyed, beautifully dressed aristocrat who wanted the man she loved, and who, she knew, loved her.

There was a fierce sweetness in this latter thought, and Daisy hugged it to her heart with all the passionate gratitude of a newly-awakened realisation of what love can mean.

And then, swamping every thought, stultifying every emotion, there came the recollection of her mother—or, at least, of Lizzie Carson, the truth of



whose story now seemed indubitable, and which cold facts compelled her to believe.

Care of her, and her regeneration, if it lay in her power, these were the things which were henceforward to fill her life, and take the place of the happiness which would have been hers, if she had drowned the voice of conscience which pointed to such an utterly different road.

Love is a many-sided sacrifice ; it means thoughtfulness for others ; it means putting their good before self-gratification. Love like this is eternal, infinite, and does not cease with life, but triumphs over Death itself.

That was how Daisy Harland interpreted love, and the volcano-like force of it had caused her to miss the early train to London, in order that she might be at the hospital the moment that it was possible for an enquiry to be received.

A faint hope flowered in her heart that Martin might have taken a turn for the better, that she might be allowed to see him just once before she went out of his life ; she told herself that even the memory of a few words and a smile would be something to think of in the empty dreary days to come, which, though she bravely hid the truth, even from herself, Daisy secretly dreaded.

She shrank from the thought of life in the poorest quarter of an overcrowded city like London, and she knew that her salary, even night and day school combined, would not admit of more than a couple of very plainly furnished rooms.

But, such is the imperfection of human nature even at its highest and best, that Daisy rebelled fiercely at the thought of Ailsa eventually securing Martin Eversley's love.

With incredible swiftness, and anguished accuracy, her brain leaped forward into the future. She saw Martin growing tired of a love which could never be satisfied, and turning for consolation to this slim, pale, haughty specimen of a class to which neither he nor she belonged. It might only be a second-best love, but that was no consolation to the pain-wracked girl who saw Ailsa Graham enthroned as the mistress of Martin's home, a great influence in his life, which she—Daisy—had hoped, for a few brief days, to have been.

"Oh, I can't face it! I can't!"

Daisy unconsciously spoke the words aloud, and her little hands clenched and unclenched into tight balls. Her eyes, wide with pain, were still seeing the mental picture of Martin Eversley's future.

But Ailsa, who was most unreasonably chagrined to find Daisy there at all, thought that she was speaking of the future which she had carved out for herself, entirely of her own accord.

A qualm seized the elder girl, and a look of intense annoyance robbed her rather colourless beauty of all attractiveness for a few minutes.

She was unaware of Julia Milburn's plot, but she was fully appreciative of the fact that Daisy's voluntary removal of herself from the village would

mean a great deal towards clearing her own path with the man who still, most strangely, held every shred of her love.

And now Daisy talked of abandoning her plans !

" Surely it is a little late to talk like that ? What will you do here in Lynton if you decide to stay ? Your post at the school has already been filled," she said, sharply, and her china blue eyes fixed themselves on Daisy's warmer, more vivid beauty, with a cold, unpleasant stare.

She experienced a decided sense of relief when Daisy said, a little wearily, for she could see no end to the long grey road on which she had set her feet, " Oh, I didn't mean that, Ailsa. I'm going to London, but I wanted to see how Martin was before I went, and the train does not leave for half-an-hour yet."

Evidently the train which Ailsa had heard was a local train.

She was not going to bare her heart for the other girl to see ; she would not let Ailsa even guess the torment that her spirit suffered.

Further conversation was checked by the opening of the hospital door.

The stiff-collared and cuffed nurse who stood there frowned slightly at the sight of Ailsa Graham.

She was heartily tired of her frequent visits and telephone calls, all made in the haughty, overbearing way which made her so unpopular with her own sex.

But she felt sorry for Daisy, for, like most people

in the village, she very cordially liked the charming, gentle girl, who had a smile and a kind word for everybody.

If Daisy had been alone, she would certainly have stretched a point in allowing her to see Martin for a few minutes ; but, unfortunately for Daisy and the long months of trial that followed, she could not extend this privilege to her in front of Miss Graham, who was that most detestable of all things, a salaried servant who was an intimate personal friend of those who employed her ; for, owing to her family connections, Ailsa was received in houses which politely ignored the fact that she was teaching in the village school.

"No, I'm sorry, but Mr. Eversley is not yet allowed to receive visitors. The doctor's orders are that no exception is to be made to this rule," said the nurse.

She said "Thank you," with chilly politeness to Ailsa Graham, as she took from her hands a large sheaf of lilies which must have cost half her week's wages ; but her eyes smiled, and her manner was warm and friendly as she turned to Daisy and asked if she could take any message for her.

"Oh, yes, please. Tell him—tell him——" Daisy's voice faltered. Love was singing so loud a song in her heart, but she had to stifle its music and choke back the words which would have rushed so warmly and readily to her lips had she been alone.

Instead, she said, in a voice which was dulled by the very force of her feelings, "Please tell Mr.



Eversley that I wish him a speedy recovery and every success, and," as the thought occurred to her, "please tell him, too, that I will write to him from London."

"Certainly I will do that, Miss Harland," was the nurse's kindly reply. As Daisy was about to turn away, she held out her own hand and said, "May I, too, wish you every success? You deserve it," she added, in a very decided voice, which was meant for Ailsa Graham to overhear.

"Thank you, nurse. Good-bye," said Daisy, and with a perfunctory handclasp from Ailsa—which consisted of the tips of three fingers—Daisy set her face towards the station, where stood the train which would take her to London, and—Lizzie Carson.

## CHAPTER XXIV

PENTER'S Place, a blind alley which gave off the most populous part of Waterloo Bridge Road, contained seven houses on one side, and four houses and three shops on the other. The last of the three shops was a public house, which, in her search for a new abode, had appealed so strongly to Lizzie Carson that she had blinded herself to the very obvious defects of the house in which she had taken a couple of unfurnished rooms, and had written to Daisy that the street was clean and quiet, and nice and convenient for her school, which was in Southwark.

As a matter of fact, Penter's Place was neither clean nor quiet, and the walls of the house in which Daisy was to live were peeling in dank strips. Slatternly women, some of them pitiably young to have faces so apathetic and coarse, lounged in six out of the seven doorways, and people were always coming and going from the "Star in the Sky"—which was the brutally ironic name of the public house—with jugs and bottles in their hands.

It was early afternoon when Daisy, with a puzzled look on her fair, lovely face, made the acquaintance-ship of Penter's Place.

The women were engaged in "sloshing down their fronts," as they called it, a task which had been performed by women who loved their homes at least six hours ago.

The taxi which Daisy had taken from the station—she had far too much luggage to walk—stopped at No. 7, and Daisy shrank from the crowd of small boys who immediately surrounded the cab and fought with each other for the job of carrying her box into the dark, dirty passage.

The women all leaned on their brooms, or held dirty, dripping house flannels in their hands, heedless of the fact that the water was running all over their freshly-washed steps, and stared long and hard at the beautiful young girl, who looked about as much in harmony with her surroundings as a lily on a mound of soot.

"That ain't the gel Mrs. Carson's been gassing about ever since she come, is it? Crikey, she's some torf, ain't she?"

Daisy heard the words, but they conveyed very little meaning to her; she was guided more by instinct than knowledge, and she blushed a vivid pink because she was naturally shy, and had to approach the group of insolently staring women and ask for information.

"I beg your pardon," she said, in her sweet, beautifully modulated tones, "but could you tell me how I am to find Mrs. Carson?"

She had knocked twice on the door, but nobody had answered her, the reason being that the lady

who shared the house with Mrs. Carson had gone to the "Star in the Sky" for her midday refreshment, and her mother had set out on the same errand, meaning to have nothing but the smallest "nip", but the "Star in the Sky" had proved too bright for her.

The women whom Daisy addressed looked strangely at her, she thought; she did not know how puzzled they were to account for her relationship to their new neighbour.

Three out of the four women contented themselves with staring, but the fourth, older and kindlier looking than the rest, gave Daisy the benefit of her advice and even helped her to carry it out.

"Yer ma's out with Mrs. Timms at the "Star in the Sky"—she jerked her thumb over her shoulder towards the public house at the corner, and Daisy's heart sank. "But she'll be in presently, I 'spect; bound to," she added, with far more confidence than she felt.

She seized hold of Daisy's trunk with as much ease as a man, and marched towards Daisy's home, the door of which opened hospitably in response to a kick.

"Yer ma's rooms is on the first floor, my dear. I'll take this up for yer, and I'll send my young Charlie round ter fetch yer ma, if she ain't come by the time 'e's 'ome from school," she said, between gasping breaths as she dragged the heavy trunk upstairs, declining Daisy's help, and finally deposited it on a narrow landing.



"Thank you so much; it is very kind of you to help me," said Daisy, sweetly and a little shyly, because she was speaking to a stranger.

There were only two rooms on the first floor of the little house, so Daisy concluded that both belonged to her and her mother.

"Oh, that's all right, my dear—'ope your ma 'ud do as much for one o' my gals if she comes 'ome a bit afore 'er time like. Yer wouldn't like me ter sit and keep yer company fer a bit till yer ma comes?" she asked, partly out of genuine kindliness, but much more from curiosity to see what kind of a home the latest arrival in Penter's Place possessed.

"No, thank you. I would not dream of troubling you," said Daisy, very earnestly—too earnestly for her neighbour's liking, for Mrs. Hooley took her departure in a huff, muttering something about "blooming stuck-up swankers," which only troubled Daisy very vaguely, for her heart was one huge ache, and all she longed for was privacy, somewhere, anywhere, so long as she could be alone, and free to give rein to the feelings that threatened to overmaster her if she fought with them a moment longer.

## CHAPTER XXV.

**D**AISY opened the door of the nearest room and went in.

It happened to be the living room. A fire burned brightly in the grate, and seemed to give the disconsolate girl some kind of a welcome.

The furniture consisted of a cheap fumed oak suite, a deal table, a new sofa, covered with shiny American leather, a screen covered with black cloth, on which had been pasted a number of crudely humorous picture postcards, all from popular seaside resorts, and a wicker armchair, which stood by the fireplace.

The floor was covered with linoleum of a pattern which made Daisy shiver, and the space above the mantelpiece was plastered with hideously coloured cards—purchasable in bulk for sixpence at the local bazaar—which asked questions such as “What is home without a mother?” and “Are we downhearted?” The latter question was answered, for, after a space, coloured blue—the rest of the card was red—appeared the word “No!” in very large yellow letters.

An unframed picture, entitled “When did you last see your father?” which turned out to have been a gift on the part of the proprietors of a

famous meat extract, completed the adornment of the room.

The table was spread with a cold repast, consisting of a plate of ham and beef, a loaf of bread, and half a pound of margarine in a glass butter dish with a swan on the top, some pickles in a jam jar, and an openwork treacle tart, which latter had been the inspiration and final effort of Lizzie Carson to prepare what she called "a handsome dinner" for Daisy.

If she had not yielded to the allurements of the "Star in the Sky," if she had shown the smallest interest in Daisy's arrival, some of the sting might have been taken out of the bitter humiliation which the young girl felt.

As a matter of fact, though it would have been hard to convince Daisy that such was the case, Lizzie Carson had taken a great deal of trouble over her expected arrival, and had put much hard work into the furnishing and decoration of the rooms, which, though they were hideous in Daisy's eyes, and violated every shred of good taste that she possessed, yet represented the acme of perfection to Lizzie Carson, so far as her means allowed.

She had not wasted the two hundred pounds which she had received from Julia Milburn as the price of claiming Daisy as her own daughter. She possessed a very passionate love for Betty, the only child she had ever had, and, with the exception of fifty pounds, the money had been handed over to her so that she and the very honest, satisfactory

young man with whom she was "walking out" could get married, instead of having to wait until they could scrape enough out of their meagre earnings.

The rest had been expended on the furniture with which Daisy had just made acquaintance, and it was a source of great inward satisfaction to Lizzie Carson that she had not "blued" it, as she termed the process of handing over her money to the landlord of the nearest public house in return for spirits of a very inferior quality.

At the moment when Daisy was lying face downwards on the hard sofa, sobbing out her misery and heart-break, Lizzie Carson was telling an interested audience in the "Star in the Sky" public bar all about the daughter whom she was expecting up from the country any minute.

She very generously stood one round of "treats" after another, and the whole of her weekly earnings as a City office cleaner were gone in an incredibly short time.

But she was a good customer, and so long as she kept in a merry mood, and gave no trouble, the landlord turned a deaf ear to her maudlin statements about her beautiful daughter up from the country.

As the afternoon wore on, strange sounds came to Daisy's unaccustomed ears—the sounds of men and women quarrelling, of children screaming, even at their play, and now and again an oath terrified her and caused her face to blanche with fear.



"Martin!" she moaned once or twice, and she wondered what he would say, how he would look, when he discovered that she had left Lynton for good.

She wanted him; to the uttermost corner of her frightened, desolate, aching little heart she wanted him; wanted his strength to lean upon, his love to act as a shield between her and the world which was beginning to hurt her so cruelly.

Daisy was learning one of the great truths of life, one of the hardest and most bitter. It is a great, a wonderful thing, to be capable of a mighty passion; but a far greater thing to yield it wholly when it shall be demanded as a sacrifice.

The afternoon waned, and the afterglow of a beautiful autumn sunset, which not even Southwark's smoke and grime could dim, lighted up the grotesque inscriptions on the wall above the mantel-piece.

The one which required to know what a home was like without a mother struck Daisy with a faint sense of shame.

"It is she who needs pity—not I," she told herself, gallantly, as she set about finding some sticks to rekindle the fire, which had gone out, after which she lit the gas, and set a kettle of water on to boil.

This done, she bathed her face in cold water, and redressed the long mane of shining hair, and when she had finished, there were few traces of the wild emotional storm which had just spent itself.

But, though she essayed the short journey to the "Star in the Sky" with a brave show of outward boldness, every fibre of the little sensitive body was taut with terror. There was a lurking menace in every shadowy doorway, in every street lamp, and person who passed, and once, when a young man looked at her in passing, a little scream left Daisy's lips.

It was all so new, so strange to the girl whose environment up to the present had been a small village where everybody knew and liked her.

But the big glass doors of the public house came into sight at last, and it was by chance that Daisy pushed open the right one and entered a bar for the first time in her sheltered life.

The landlord, who was serving, held a half filled jug of beer in mid-air, while his mouth gaped in open astonishment as his eyes fell upon the fair, lovely young figure in the doorway.

The bar was filled with the usual Saturday night crowd of men and women, some standing at the bar, others sitting on the wooden forms which flanked either side of the door.

The types would have been very familiar to any dweller in a large town or city, but the heavy, drink-marred faces, the smell of the drink, and the sight of her "mother" there amongst the crowd filled Daisy with a sense of horror.

She looked so pure and remote, standing so still and straight, her beautiful young face like that of an angel come suddenly amongst the customers of the "Star in the Sky."

It was Tom Wells, the landlord, who first spoke to Daisy, and there was quite a deferential note in his voice.

"Good evening, Miss. Haven't you made a mistake in the bar? It's the saloon you want, I expect," he said, with a slight bend of his fat person over the bar.

"No. I have come for my mother. I would like to take her home."

As Daisy spoke, she went towards Lizzie Carson, who had subsided on to a form, and was now very quiet.

The effect which Daisy's words produced was electrical.

The women nudged each other, and eyed her from top to toe, much as the other women had done earlier in the day.

"Garn! Don't tell me that Liz Carson ever had a gal like you, my dear. Come orf it!" said one woman, more frank than the rest.

"Tell us another," said a man with a laugh, equally unbelieving.

But Lizzie Carson felt angry that her word should be doubted; for the last week or so she had talked so much about Daisy, her beautiful girl who was a school teacher.

"You are a lot of—of—" Lizzie Carson's voice faltered, and the ready tears of the alcoholic subject came to her eyes.

"Tell them that you are my daughter!" she

commanded Daisy, turning upon the bitterly ashamed, bewildered girl at her side.

"Certainly I will, mother, but won't you come home now?" said Daisy, quietly, and then, with the tact that later on proved Lizzie Carson's salvation, she added, "I've got the kettle boiling for a cup of tea."

That seemed to decide Lizzie.

"'Course I'll come, dear," she said, with much dignity, and as the ill-assorted pair left the bar of the "Star in the Sky" the landlord muttered, "Well, I'm blowed!"



## CHAPTER XXVI

**A**ILSA had walked into the town, a distance of six miles there and back, in order to purchase the hothouse grapes and peaches, and mass of beautiful forced flowers which she carried so carefully in her arms.

She was dressed in a severely tailored blue serge suit, and wore a small hat, neither of which styles really suited her somewhat languorous beauty, which demanded a picturesque setting, but to compensate for these disadvantages, her whole being seemed to be alive, vibrant, suffused with some deep, happy excitement. Her pale blue eyes were several shades darker, her cheeks and lips glowed with colour, and even her light gold hair seemed, in some mysterious way, to have gained depth and brilliance.

It was Love, the master magician, at work. For several days past Ailsa had given herself up to the most delightful tasks that a girl can perform—the preparing of a place for the man she loves.

Influenza had broken out rather badly in Lynton and the surrounding villages, and consequently every bed, and every nurse in the local hospital, became worth their weight in more than gold—human lives.

Martin had got on so well that he was now definitely out of danger, and all that remained was to nurse him back to his normal health by means of good food, long hours of sleep, and freedom from all shocks.

"Do make whatever use you like of the cottage, my own dear boy," Miss Harland wrote from Egypt, before she had received Daisy's letter, telling her the news of her love for Martin.

"Thank you so much, Miss Graham. You are too good to me—you and Miss Daisy, and Mrs. Oakley, all three of you—it's a treat to meet such women," he said gratefully, more to himself than to the eager-eyed girl who stood by his side, looking down at him with a gaze that expressed all her tongue dared not utter.

"Oh, it will be a joy to have you, Mr. Eversley, and as for being good, well, who wouldn't be good to you?"

There was just the slightest emphasis on the pronoun, and, somehow, it made the sick man uncomfortable.

Martin Eversley was the least vain of men; never having been conscious of himself, until Daisy came into his life, he did not know that he had that in his being which drew love from women, and attracted them as a magnet attracts needles.

It was quite easy for him to dismiss the slightly uncomfortable feeling with a caustic comment to himself on the subject of swelled head, and this he did, promising Ailsa that he would come to the

cottage as soon as the doctor gave his permission.

She was gone before he found the courage to ask the questions which had been trembling on his lips during the whole of Ailsa's visit.

"How is Daisy? Is she well? Is she happy? What have I done to her that she never comes to see me, and never even enquires how I am?"

These were the questions which were burning on his tongue, but, like all who have within them the elements of greatness, Martin Eversley was modest and diffident regarding his own worth.

Ailsa had received word from the hospital authorities that morning that Martin could be expected in the afternoon and, as it was Saturday, she had been able to personally superintend the arrangements for him, and her last self-imposed task had been the long walk there and back to the town in order to purchase the most beautiful flowers and the choicest fruit that money could buy.

She was still a couple of miles from home but she was not in the least tired; her body felt as light as air, and she could easily have walked another six miles without feeling fatigued.

It was impossible to keep any happening, however private, a secret in such a place as Lynton; therefore, it was only natural for the postman to mention in the afternoon what Ailsa had herself only learned in the morning.

"How nice it be fur young Mr. Eversley to be a-comin' back to be nursed by Mistress Oakley—a good woman, fur sure, she be," said the village

deliverer of news and gossip, as well as letters and small parcels.

"Yes," replied Ailsa, somewhat shortly.

She had not yet accustomed herself to village life, and though she loved a man who had begun on a much lower rung of the ladder than the postman, she yet could find no manner of pleasure in addressing or being addressed by him.

But her eyes became alert, and her voice eager when she learned from the old man's gossip that his bundle of letters contained one for Martin Eversley, addressed to the hospital.

"From London, it be," the old man rambled on, and he made no objection when Ailsa said, very sweetly and condescendingly, "If it is allowed, I will take Mr. Eversley's letter, as he is coming to the cottage this afternoon."

It was impossible for the old man to resist the softly-spoken young schoolmistress.

"Tisn't exactly allowed, Miss, but 'tis near enough to the young man, I reckon, seeing he's on his way to 'ee now," and with a respectful "Good afternoon," the postman trudged off to deliver the rest of his letters innocent of the fact that he had forged another link in the chain of one of the strangest love stories that Lynton had ever known.

When he was well down the road, Ailsa looked at the letter in her hand, and the merest glance satisfied her that it was from Daisy. She knew the clear, firm handwriting too well to be mistaken.



The long line of aristocrats from whom she was descended did not cause Ailsa Graham to hesitate a second in the performance of an action of which the humblest might, and would have, been utterly ashamed.

Certainly she did not read what the letter contained, but she could easily guess, and refraining did not make her action any the less despicable.

Taking from her pocket the box of matches which she always carried along with the cigarettes which she occasionally smoked out of doors, she lit one, and, applying it to the corner of the envelope, burned Daisy's letter until it was only a little heap of black ashes.

All the time that she was dressing for Martin's arrival Ailsa thought about the letter which she had stolen.

It is an ugly word to apply to an action of one's own, but there was no other word which could describe it, face to face with bare facts.

Ailsa's training made her ashamed of her action, but her passionate love more than justified it in her own eyes, and she exulted fiercely in the knowledge that she had placed another stumbling block in her rival's path. The eyes which looked out of the young face were hard as flints, and unrepentant as those of the most case hardened criminal.

"Why couldn't she stick to Gerald, who loves her far more than she deserves? Why must she steal the man I want?" she asked herself, fiercely.

In her own room, safe from the shelter of enquiring

eyes, Ailsa felt that she could give rein to the feelings which were torturing her, as they had tortured countless thousands of her sex before she was born, and doubtless would do long after she had forgotten what it meant to be in love.

Because, in marrying Martin, she would, in her own opinion, be taking a step downward in the social scale, Ailsa chose to think that her love for the young pugilist-author was wholly pure and disinterested.

As she dressed her long flaxen hair first one way and then another in front of the old-fashioned mirror, the thought of Martin's ravings when he had cried out for Daisy over and over again, caused her the most exquisite mental torture.

It was reflected in the usually calm expression of her face, and, realising that it made her look years older and almost plain, Ailsa swallowed a dose of the drug to which she had lately accustomed herself in order to soothe her nerves, and smiled when its beneficent effects began to be apparent.

She chose a gown of her favourite pale blue, in ninon, trimmed with soft white fur at neck and wrists, and when she had finished, she was truly a pleasing picture of young English womanhood, with cheeks and lips flushed to a bright pink, and eyes shining as if a little taper had been lit behind each.

She had taken more of the drug than she had thought ; it had imbued her with a devil-may-care spirit of abandon which sent her hopes soaring on the mad wings of her desire.

"I can hear the car coming down the road, Mrs. Oakley. Is everything quite ready—the tea laid, the kettle boiling, and the fire lighted in Mr. Martin's room?" Ailsa ran to the landing outside her door, and called over the balusters.

A grunt answered her. Mrs. Oakley had almost broken her heart over Daisy's departure, giving it as her unasked opinion that Lizzie Carson ought to be hung, drawn, and quartered for turning up and claiming Daisy after all those years.

She also hated Mrs. Milburn, and Ailsa was far too friendly with the dashing young widow for her liking. More than once she had muttered something about birds of a feather, and she frowned as Ailsa's clear, high-bred voice came floating downstairs to her.

"She'll try to get hold of him, I suppose, but she might just as well save herself the trouble. It don't need more than half a blind eye to see where Mr. Martin's heart is," said the good woman to her husband as she clattered about the little kitchen, a sure sign that she was upset.

It was Ailsa and not she who ran to open the door for Martin. He was looking quite bright and fit, if a trifle thin and pale, and his voice had all the old eager ring as he said, directly he had shaken hands with Ailsa and Mr. and Mrs. Oakley, "But where's Miss Daisy? Is she out this afternoon?"

There was a wistful note in his voice that tore at Ailsa Graham's jealous heart; she felt more bitter than ever towards the absent girl.

"She's gone," she said, answering the question before either of the Oakleys could say a word. "She's been gone to London over a week. Her mother came and made herself known—a perfectly appalling creature, by the way—and Miss Harland deemed it her duty to go and live with her parent."

The sentence finished with a contemptuous little shrug, and Ailsa found it impossible to keep all of the venom which she felt out of her voice, though she had striven to make it as unconcerned as possible.

A sudden flame seemed to drive through Martin Eversley; he drew himself up, and his massive frame, though it was wasted with illness, seemed to take on some of the majesty that one always associates with an emperor, or a great warrior, as he said, slowly and distinctly, so that every word bit with vitriol-like force into the consciousness of her for whom they were uttered, "If Miss Harland thought fit to link her life to that of her mother, then the woman, whoever she is, is anything but an appalling creature, as you choose to call her; she is greatly to be envied, and, since Miss Harland is not here to defend her mother, wouldn't it be kinder not to mention her at all?"

For that brief moment, Martin Eversley felt that he hated the girl who had dared to speak in such a way of anybody so nearly related to Daisy as her mother. The same impulse to defend Lizzie Carson that had come to Daisy when Julia Milburn had been her traducer now came to Martin



Eversley, and both had obeyed it, instantly and fully.

Ailsa felt herself snubbed, and the look of delight on Mrs. Oakley's round, good-natured face did not help to soothe her as she pushed past her and ran upstairs to her own room, where, catching sight of the bottle containing her drug, she took another dose, which immediately restored both her temper and good spirits, and within ten minutes she had forgotten the cause of her grievance, and the only emotion of which she was conscious was her fiercely burning love for the man downstairs, and who was at that moment busily engaged in conversation with Mrs. Oakley over Daisy's departure.

"She left her address with you, did you say, Mrs. Oakley? I'd be so glad if you would give it to me, and post this at once."

As he spoke, Martin tore a couple of pages out of his pocket book and wrote the letter which came back, a week later, marked "Not known."

Mrs. Oakley was out posting Martin's letter and her husband was working in the garden when Ailsa, more than recovered from her anger at being snubbed by Martin Eversley, made her appearance in the parlour, where tea had been laid.

She looked charming enough to please the fancy of any man as she cooed a pretty apology and took her place daintily behind the old-fashioned silver teapot.

But Martin's disappointed eyes saw no beauty in the girl; all the way home from the hospital

he had been imagining the delight of seeing Daisy once more, he had felt her hand, soft and cool as the petals of a rose, within his own. And now . . . . .

He looked at Ailsa, flushed and smiling as she handed him his tea, and he wondered what he could talk to her about. She was not of his world ; they had no tastes in common, and, ransack his tired brain as he would, he could think of nothing likely to interest her.

But, to his surprise, there was no need for conversational effort on his part ; indeed, Ailsa made him feel slightly uncomfortable by her efforts to prevent him from doing anything at all for himself.

Gathering together all the cushions in the room, she piled them into the big armchair, which she had drawn up to the blazing fire, and insisted upon placing Martin therein, saying, as she playfully pushed his shoulders, " Now, don't forget that you are an invalid, and, as such, you are to be bullied and coaxed and petted—in fact, you have got to do just as you are told."

Martin, hoping that he did not look as big an idiot as he felt, said " Thank you," and wondered, privately, who was to do the coaxing and the petting.

He did not pursue the train of thought long, for Ailsa had betaken herself to the piano, and the song she chose to sing was one which sent the blood racing to Martin's face, and little hammers seemed

to thump in his head as the recollection of the last time that he had heard the same sentiment expressed in the same words came to his memory.

Perhaps Ailsa meant the song to act as an invitation and a hint ; whatever the intention, the fact remained that she had chosen to sing it.

It was Moore's well-known ballad, the same that had caused her brother to receive one of the soundest thrashings of his life when he had repeated it, in that same room, one still summer night.

“ Then, oh ! what pleasure, where'er we rove,  
To be sure to find something still that is dear,  
And to know, when far from the lips we love,  
We've but to make love to the lips we are near.”

Ailsa's slim white fingers twinkled over the old ivory keys, and played the rather artificially pretty closing chords of the accompaniment, and then she dropped her hands in her lap, waiting for some expression of approval, or thanks.

None came.

She got up from the piano and crossed the room.

Martin was leaning forward, his face working with mingled anger and passionate longing as his thoughts flew from Gerald Graham to Daisy, who had probably gone for ever out of his life.

But the lovesick girl who watched the keen, handsome face chose to read her own desires into what she saw.

Perhaps the drug was responsible for her unbalanced, abnormal state ; but whatever it was,

Ailsa thought that she saw love where only anger and longing for another woman lay.

She slipped to her knees beside Martin, and laid her white hand timidly on his knee.

"Has—has it come, dear? Do you care?" she whispered, and even the whisper was an effort, for her heart was beating so that speech was almost strangled.

In his amazement, Martin let his hand fall heavily on the slender shoulder at his knee; he had intended to rest it upon the arm of the chair. But to Ailsa, the unwitting action was a very torment of delight; she waited, she knew not for what, panting, with dry, burning lips, leaping pulse, and an agony of expectancy thrilled her through and through. She felt that she could wait no longer; with an eager, impulsive movement, unpremeditated and spasmodic, she raised herself a little, and then laid her head upon his breast. So exquisite were the pangs of love that she uttered a low moan, and lay, like a tired, happy child, in Martin Eversley's arms.

Not a word had been spoken, and Martin looked blankly at the fair head which nestled so contentedly in the crook of his arm.

Then a sudden idea, an explanation, occurred to him. The girl was not feeling well!

"Here, let me help you to the sofa, Miss Graham," were his first words, and then he added, as if to himself, "I haven't any brandy, but I wonder if a drop of cold tea would help."



The low-spoken, practical words recalled Ailsa to herself with a jerk, but she was now beyond her own power of control; she became slightly hysterical and exceedingly angry.

"Oh, can't you read what is in my heart for you, Martin?" she cried, using his Christian name as easily as if she had known him from childhood.

Then, as she saw his expression of blank amazement, her tone changed to one of pleading. She slipped to her knees once more and held Martin's hands which even yet, after months of rest from manual toil, were still rough and calloused with past labour. Pressing them passionately to her lips, she said, speaking in little rapid jerks, "I—I love you, Martin . . . more than my life I love you, and want you. From the first, the very moment that I laid eyes upon you, I wanted you. I was mad for love of you then, and I am maddest of all now, dear. Surely you cannot remain cold to such a love as this, Martin? Try to love me—please try, dear."

Her voice died away into a little moan. She released Martin's hand, and sank, a little shuddering heap of blue ninon and white fur, upon the ground, her hot face buried in her hands.

It was a purely and obtusely masculine thought that occurred to Martin Eversley. The girl was not quite right in her head! She had referred to herself as being mad at some time or another; possibly she was suffering from a recurrence of the same illness!

Rapidly pouring out a cup of tea from the now cold tea-pot, he held it firmly to Ailsa's trembling lips, and made her drink, taking no notice whatsoever of her emotional outburst, treating it as if it had never occurred.

"Drink this, Miss Graham, and you'll soon feel better," he said, in a calm, matter-of-fact voice.

As he was almost forcing the unpleasant liquid down Ailsa's throat, he heard a sound which filled him with joy.

Mrs. Oakley was saying "good night" to a friend, and the next moment she bustled into the little parlour to see how tea was progressing.

Her mouth, as well as her round blue eyes, opened widely when she saw Ailsa being supported by Martin's arm, while, with the other hand, he was holding a cup to her lips.

"'Ave you come over faint, or something, Miss?" said Mrs. Oakley, coming further into the room.

Martin looked up with a smile of thankfulness which Ailsa saw, and, deeply in love as she undoubtedly was, she came near to hating the object of it at that moment.

Ailsa made an astonishing recovery as soon as one of her own sex appeared to take charge of her, and lay down on the sofa, with her face to the wall, refusing to answer when Mrs. Oakley spoke to her, offering her all the homely remedies she knew.

Martin quitted the parlour, and a few minutes

later, the heart-sick, miserable girl on the sofa heard his deep voice in the hall saying to Mrs. Oakley, who protested loudly, "No, I shall be going to London shortly, Mrs. Oakley, and till I go, I shall find the Cobbler's Arms more convenient because of the business I shall have to transact. Possibly as many as three or four men will have to be put up for several nights, and I could not trespass on your kindness to that extent. By the way," he finished, in a voice which was lowered on purpose, but every syllable carried to the now thoroughly ashamed girl in the parlour, "I'll get Dr. Browne to give a look-in to-night. Miss Graham has been overworking, I expect. She certainly is unstrung, and a tonic may do her good."

Ailsa stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth to prevent herself from screaming, as she heard Martin's steps pass down the road, and when Dr. Browne, who could not attend until the following morning, came to enquire for his prospective patient, Ailsa had packed her things hurriedly and departed, having sent a telegram in advance to Weatherly Towers to tell her mother that she was leaving Lynton for good.

## CHAPTER XXVII

FROM a mere sense of duty, Daisy's regard for the woman whom she believed to be her mother had deepened into liking, if not actually into the love which she felt she ought to possess for the one who had given her birth.

There was so much charm in Daisy's personality that was inexpressible, indefinable; one had to live with it before one felt its sweetness and its force.

"Mother, one of the pupil teachers at the school is leaving her rooms, and they are only a shilling a week dearer than these. It would be so much nearer for me, and I could come home to dinner. Unless it would hurt you very much to leave this neighbourhood, I would like to move into them the week after next."

In reality, it was a tactful move on Daisy's part to wean her "mother" from the associates who encouraged her to spend her time in the public bar of the "Star in the Sky."

But Lizzie Carson did not suspect this; the young girl was too fervent in her desire to help her to a cleaner, sweeter life to let her see what was in her mind and heart.

But, as Daisy strove and worked, by night as



well as by day, the roses faded from her cheeks and her eyes grew too large for her small white face.

Some of the neighbours in Penter's Place remarked on this, and the same night Daisy's journeys to the "Star in the Sky" to escort her "mother" home ceased to become necessary, for Lizzie Carson was not wholly bad, and she was beginning to love the girl who, quite evidently, was not ashamed to own her wherever she went, and to whomsoever she spoke.

"Mother, your hair is so long and thick, and very pretty. What about letting me wash it for you, and I'll show you a better way to dress it," said Daisy, one Sunday morning, as she watched Lizzie Carson twist her hair into an ugly "bun" and stab a skewer of a hairpin through it.

After a few feeble protests, Lizzie consented, but as she sat before the glass and watched a pretty and becoming coiffure emerge from beneath Daisy's clever fingers, a desire which she had thought dead and buried years ago by her husband's brutality—a desire to look pretty which never dies until a woman is in her grave—awoke within her, and she began smiling and prinking at herself, and actually washed an old lace collar and fixed a bow of black velvet with a paste buckle, at her throat.

Daisy could have cried for joy!

"Why, mother, you look quite young! Do come with me for a ride on top of the tram, and tell me about the places as we pass them. I never have anybody to take me about London," said Daisy,

when the dinner things were washed up and put away.

It was too late for the public house by the time that they got home to Penter's Place, and Daisy went to bed happy that night, for she had won her first battle! Not a drop of drink had passed Lizzie Carson's lips that day.

"What do you want ter git up at this un'oly hour for—tain't time for school," grumbled Daisy's "mother," when she arose stealthily at six instead of seven the morning after her first victory.

"I'll do that bit o' mendin' for yer," said Lizzie, sitting up in bed, rubbing the sleep from the eyes which beheld Daisy pulling a bundle of needlework and her work basket into bed with her.

For the first time since she had come to London, Daisy bent over the bed which Lizzie Carson occupied and kissed her softly on the lips. There was a great and tender pity in her heart for the poor creature who looked up at her in such utter surprise, with which was mingled more than a little embarrassment.

"This isn't mending that you can help me with, mother," she said, looking down at her with the smile that Lizzie Carson always found irresistible. "I'll tell you what it is when I've finished," she said, lighting the lamp by her bed, and snuggling back again between the sheets.

The tears were very near the surface of Lizzie Carson's eyes when Daisy presented her with the results of her morning labours.

"I never 'ad nothink ter fit like this," she said, proudly, as she turned and twisted herself before the narrow strip of looking glass in their bedroom.

Daisy had let out and altered for her one of her own costumes—the best one that she possessed, in fact, because it was the only one suitable for the purpose.

But alas! Lizzie found the temptation to show herself in the "Star in the Sky" too much for her that afternoon, and for the first time for over a week, Daisy had to go and fetch her home at night in the usual condition.

It was the next day that Daisy purposed to move into different rooms at Camden Town, which was the school to which she had been transferred after a day or two in Southwark, and Lizzie Carson, bitterly ashamed of her outburst of the previous night, gave in at once.

And while Daisy was helping to put their few possessions into the moving van, Martin was writing the letter which, too late for the London post on Saturday, was delivered on Monday morning at the address which Daisy had left with Mrs. Oakley, and eventually returned to him, through the Post Office, marked "Not known—gone away."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**M**OTHER, what *do* you think happened this morning?"

Daisy's face was all aglow, her eyes were shining, and her dark gold hair, ruffled into little shining curls over her forehead, made her look like the childish, care-free young creature that she had been before London had set its mark upon her.

"I don't know, my dear. Nobody's gone and left you a fortune, I suppose, 'ave they?"

A sudden fear clutched at Lizzie Carson's heart as she spoke. Truly, wrongdoers hang themselves with their own rope, if given enough time in which to perform the task.

Daisy had been with her nearly six months, and she loved the girl who had been the means of making her a respectable woman once more.

For nearly four months Lizzie Carson had kept the pledge which she had signed on coming into the rooms in Camden Town.

Nobody but she knew what hours of mental and physical agony, unsatisfied craving and eager, unfulfilled longing, had gone into the keeping of that pledge, but, as always, strength had grown with each resistance, and now, a much more attractive



woman in every way, Lizzie Carson found that she was quite capable of passing a public house without going inside.

But, even so, she had her moments of weakness, and she clung fiercely to Daisy's pure young strength, fearful of her own impotence at these times.

Always she lived in the fear that, somehow, some day, her deception would be discovered, but she was afraid to confess, not only because of the action of the law so far as she herself was concerned, but because of Betty, her own daughter, who might be involved, as she had had most of the money.

Lizzie smiled tenderly at the sweet young figure in the doorway; it was a long time since Daisy had looked so well or so happy.

"Well, what was it, dear?" she said again, pausing with the ovencloth in her hand as she was about to take Daisy's dinner out of the oven.

"Why, I had to take the children on to the Heath for their Nature study this morning, and a dear old gentleman stopped and listened for a long time to the lesson, and then he gave me these." Daisy smiled and dimpled once more as she triumphantly flourished a couple of one pound Treasury notes above her head. "He told me to buy sweets for the whole class, but I've thought of something better than that, if you'll help me, mother," finished Daisy, her eyes bright, like blue, sunflecked water.

There were few things that Lizzie Carson would not do for the girl for whom she would have cheer-

fully given ten years of her life to have had a right to the sacred word which fell from her lips.

"What is it, Daisy?" she said, again.

"Why, we'll give them a party to-morrow afternoon, as it's Saturday," said Daisy, eagerly.

"Here?" said Lizzie Carson, a trifle doubtfully.

"Why, yes. We can do it quite easily. I'll borrow some crockery from neighbours, and we'll make most of the cakes ourselves in the morning. The money will run to some good plain sweets and a little toy each. We'll have games, and I know where we can hire a gramophone for a shilling an hour with records which the kiddies will love. Oh, say you will, mother," Daisy pleaded, catching Lizzie Carson's hand between both her own, and pressing it to her warm young cheek.

"Of course you kin 'ave your party—'ave the whole of Camden Town if I 'ad room for 'em," said Lizzie Carson, at once.

It was certainly a very different Lizzie Carson who set out to do the shopping for the party early the next morning.

Her face was clear of all traces of drink, her eyes were bright, and her whole bearing was that of a woman who has some powerful interest in life.

The morning was spent in happy preparation for the children, and by half-past three, Lizzie Carson, in a pretty pale blue blouse that Daisy had made for her, and a neat black skirt, was quite ready to receive their little guests.

Their shyness vanished directly they saw their

teacher, and Daisy was called upon to admire the Sunday frocks and boots and suits of eighteen little people, but still the party could not start, for one little girl was missing.

She turned up as the clock was striking four, holding shyly on to the hand of a big, kindly faced, burly man who explained that Lily had been obliged to wait until he came home from work because there was nobody to wash her and get her ready, she having no mother, and being only five years old.

"Oh, poor mite! Haven't you even got a landlady?" asked Lizzie Carson, holding out her arms to the child, who was certainly the queerest little specimen of humanity so far as appearance went.

Lily's father made an expressive gesture by raising an imaginary glass to his lips, and Daisy immediately understood the landlady's failing.

"Lily don't seem rightly tricked out somehow, now she's alongside of other kids," he said, rather dolefully, as he scratched his head, and regarded his small daughter with a curiously puzzled expression on his face.

Lily was attired in garments of her father's choosing, and they consisted of a trimmed hat which would have done very well for a girl of ten, but which almost buried five-year-old Lily, a boy's reefer coat with brass buttons, a pink petticoat which had been put on outside her black frock, and tied with a mauve silk sash. An imitation diamond brooch and a necklace of seashells finished the poor little creature's toilet.

"No, she don't look right, do she, Ma'am?" said her father, turning his hopelessly puzzled eyes from Daisy to Lizzie Carson.

"She won't enjoy the party got up like that, poor lamb. Here, let her come with me, I'll find her something that belonged to my daughter when she was a baby," said Lizzie Carson, off her guard for once, speaking straight from her heart.

Greatly puzzled, Daisy followed her "mother" into their bedroom, and when Lily had been divested of her unsuitable attire, she saw the child clothed in garments which might have been made for her.

They were rough, but quite whole and very clean, and when Daisy could no longer restrain her curiosity, she burst out, "Mother, how could those have been my garments as a baby, when I was handed over to Miss Harland before I was six months old?"

Lizzie Carson was busily engaged in tying the child's sash into a bow at the back, and in consequence, her face was hidden from Daisy; if it had not been averted, Daisy would have seen the face of her supposed "mother" blanch with fear, and a nameless dread creep into her eyes.

"Mother, how could these have been my clothes if I was your only child, and you never saw me from the age of four months until I was past twenty?"

Daisy's voice was not hard or suspicious; it was simply curious.

Her question gave the guilty, wretched woman an idea for a satisfactory answer.

"You were not the only child, Daisy. You had



a sister, but she died when she was about five."

It was a lie, for Betty Carson was very much alive, and happily married, and none knew it better than her mother, who had been to see her only a day or two ago, while Daisy was at afternoon school.

"I see. Oh, I am so sorry. Poor mother!" and, believing her, Daisy took the thoroughly ashamed woman in her strong young arms, and gave her a warm, impulsive hug.

"Lily looks as nice as any of them, now, doesn't she, Mr. Turner?" laughed Daisy, as she led the now suitably-attired little girl into the room where the party was to be held.

"She does, that," was the widower's hearty response, and Daisy was obliged to smile at the simple directness of his question to her "mother," when a lull occurred in the wild fun which the children made for themselves.

"Meaning no offence, Ma'am, might I ask if you be a widder?"

Daisy felt more than glad of the pale blue blouse and the neat black skirt that she had made in her spare time for her "mother," and she marvelled at the pink blush which, starting beneath Lizzie Carson's chin, spread upwards all over her face until it lapped the roots of her nicely dressed brown hair.

"After all, she's only forty-six—why shouldn't she? I'm sure the man looks nice and honest, and the little girl is a sweet kiddie," thought Daisy, as she allowed herself to be blinded for a game of Blind Man's Buff.

She caught scraps of low-toned conversation from the corner where her "mother" sat beside Ben Turner.

"Ganger of a navvy squad in constant work, with four quid a week, and extra for overtime," was one tit-bit that reached her alert ears.

"Well, I'm sure my daughter and me 'ud only be too glad ter mend yer bits of things if yer likes to bring 'em round, Mr. Turner, or else send 'em with little Lily to school. Ain't she in your class at school, Daisy, Mr. Turner's little gel, I mean?" as Daisy came groping in their direction.

"Yes, mother," was all that Daisy replied, as she moved off, preferring to leave the little idyll to work itself out.

As she chased the children, causing endless laughter by her purposeful mistakes, her thoughts sped into the future, and she visualised a whole life-time in a few short minutes, as rapid thinkers will.

If the friendship begun that afternoon deepened into something more, she could safely leave her mother, with a husband, a home, and a little step-daughter to hold her to life, while she tried for a post abroad, perhaps in Egypt, so as to be near her beloved Aunt Mary, as she had always called Miss Harland.

Thoughts of Martin came crowding into her mind with painful persistence; his image came before her mental gaze, and refused to be banished.

"He never answered my letter; probably Ailsa is engaged to him by now."

The thought was bitter, and the possibility seemed a far from remote one, so, with a determined effort to throw off the cloud of depression which threatened to engulf her, Daisy tore the bandage from her eyes, and rushed amongst the delighted children with the news that she was a lion and wanted a fine fat boy or girl for her supper that night.



## CHAPTER XXIX

MARTIN Eversley sat at a small table in the little sitting room which he occupied at the "Cobbler's Arms," and as he finished signing his name to a printed agreement, a little sigh escaped his lips.

There were new lines around his mouth and eyes that had no business there; if Martin had been happy, if he had been care-free and heart-whole, as in the days before he had known of the existence of Daisy Harland, his naturally buoyant temperament would have led him to rejoice in the good fortune that had come his way during the last two years.

On the table before him lay two agreements, and he had just signed the one which gave him the greater pleasure. It was from one of the best-known publishing firms in the world, who had not only taken his first book—the book which was practically his own autobiography—but had asked for the right to publish three more.

The other agreement was for the biggest boxing match that he had so far fought—which was for the heavyweight championship of Europe, with a purse of five thousand pounds.

Win or lose, it was to be his last match, his farewell to the ring, and he paid no heed to the



fighting experts who raved and stormed at him, telling him that he was a criminal to forsake the art which he so worthily adorned, which could so ill afford to lose such fine, clean fighters as himself.

"Want to write books? Pah! leave that to the old women in trousers whose job it is," was the contemptuous advice of those whose library consisted solely of bound files of the "Sporting Life."

Martin had acquired a fair amount of fame as a fighter, and his publishers were banking a good deal on the huge advertisement which the forthcoming match would give him as an author. They intended to publish his book on the day of the match.

Portraits of himself in training, and all sorts of paragraphs, true and imaginary, had occupied the Press for several weeks now, and if he could have known that every one had been faithfully culled with loving hands, and carried about everywhere, and sometimes, when nobody was near, cried over, the clouds would have been chased from Martin Eversley's fine face like autumn leaves in the wind.

He drummed with his long, lean fingers on the coarse green table cloth, and a weary little smile crept around his lips.

"It's funny that I don't care two straws for all this now that it's come," he said, and his mind dwelt for a moment on the two thousand pounds which stood to his account in the local bank, the little motor car which was the only indulgence that

he permitted himself, and the possibilities contained in the two contracts that he had just signed.

He was entering on a new chapter of his life, and he was alone ; that was what was the matter with him.

He wanted somebody to share things with, somebody who would look up to him and think him wonderful,—yes, that is the sole secret of keeping a man's love—somebody who would coax him into buying pretty frocks and hats, and shoes ; in a word, he wanted a woman's love and sweet companionship.

But woman in the abstract would not do ; his feminine horizon had narrowed down to one, and she, for all he knew, was now the wife of another man.

He had neither seen nor heard from Ailsa Graham since the embarrassing evening in Miss Harland's cottage, and nobody seemed to have heard from Daisy.

He surmised that she was married to Gerald Graham, and that the mother who had so coolly turned up after twenty years was provided for by them.

" If I could only see her, only know whether or not she is happy with Graham," Martin sometimes said, wistfully, but there seemed no possibility of his wish being fulfilled until Fate, which shuffles the cards of destiny for kings and commoners without any regard for either, took a hand in the game.

It was the day before the boxing match, and Martin had chosen to drive his little car to London instead of going by train.

He had satisfied his manager that he was at the very top of his form, and had received the satisfactory news that the advance sales of his book had been so heavy that the first edition was exhausted. He declined to lunch either with his manager or his publisher, and drove straight from the latter's office to Penter's Place to see what kind of locality Daisy's mother had lived in.

Martin was very much a man of the world, and he had lived in places compared with which Penter's Place was like a street in Paradise ; but, to think of Daisy in such surroundings even for a hour made him almost grateful for the fact that she was married to Gerald Graham, and, of course, out of them.

He drove slowly and carefully towards the hotel in Charing Cross where he was stopping, and a hold-up at the junction between Trafalgar Square and the Strand caused a double line of motor vehicles to collect behind the policeman on traffic duty.

A taxi-cab had drawn up on Martin's left, and, glancing casually through the window at the occupants he saw something which caused the blood to rush to his head in a mad, singing torrent ; the pulses leaped in his veins, and his splendid body swayed towards the taxi for a moment, just as the driver, more alert than Martin, obeyed the policeman's signal to proceed.

In the taxi had been Gerald Graham, and, sitting so close to him that her head was on his shoulder, and her hand held tightly in his, was a beautiful girl, who, if Martin had been better up in such matters, might have been easily recognised as a queen of that particular art known as revue.

There was no mistaking their attitude ; if they were not lovers, general opinion would have had it that they should have been !

" I'll smash him to a jelly, the outsider,—not married six months, and kissing some painted rag-bag in a taxi ! " he muttered, savagely. A sudden, fierce, cruel decisiveness illuminated his face—it was as if steel bands had suddenly been tightened—and he turned his car in the same direction as that taken by the taxi in an endeavour to follow it ; but it had been joined by at least half a dozen other cabs, and the futility of trying to single out the one he was after soon became apparent.

Martin turned his car back and ate his dinner in the hotel dining room quite mechanically, for his mind was on the sight that he had just seen, and his heart was aching for Daisy ; between these emotions, proper appreciation of food was impossible.

" She's so little, so unlike other girls, to bear such a blow," he told himself, quite unconscious of the fact that the same sentiments are always expressed by men in love regarding the object of their devotion.



When Martin got into the train at Charing Cross that was to take him to Weatherly Towers, he knew that he was injuring his prospects for the forthcoming match. Such excitement as would be bound to ensue from the interview between himself and Gerald Graham—and to add to his misery, possibly he would have a sight of Daisy, who must be kept from all knowledge of the real object of his visit—these things would be very bad for him, but, somehow, he felt that it would be far worse to have to fight through the match knowing that he had let slip the opportunity for bringing his former employer to his senses.

He had given up the idea of thrashing him ; that was his first crude, elemental impulse, though an essentially masculine one.

But that would rebound upon Daisy, and hurt her, he decided, when his first tempestuous anger had cooled, and that he could never bring himself to do.

He meant to reason with Gerald Graham, as one man to another, remind him of what sort of a girl he had succeeded in winning for his wife, and point out that if he persisted in riding in taxicabs with young women in his arms, he was bound to be found out sooner or later ; instead of himself, it might easily have been a friend of Daisy who had looked into the window of his taxi, and so on.

“ Don’t know how he’ll take it ; don’t much care, hang him ! ” muttered Martin, as he swung his way up the broad gravelled path which led to Weatherly Towers.

## CHAPTER XXX

MRS. Graham and her family were assembled in the drawing room, waiting for the single maid, who now represented the staff at Weatherly Towers, to summon them to dinner.

"Dinner, Mason?"

Mrs. Graham asked the question sharply, querulously; her eyes burned and glowed in her deathly white face with a fierceness that would have warned a medical man of approaching trouble.

The maid shook her head as she approached.

"Not just yet, Madam. There's a gentleman in the hall who says he must speak to Mr. Gerald at once. Says it's urgent."

"Who is it?" asked Gerald, easily, looking up from the sporting paper which lay across his knees.

"Mr. Martin Heverfield, I think the name was," replied the girl, who, in her brief passage between the hall and the drawing room had forgotten the name.

There was, however, sufficient resemblance to cause Mrs. Graham to start to her feet, and exclaim, "If it is that prize-fighter person, Gerald, I refuse to receive him."

Ailsa, who was looking over a fashion book with her sister, suddenly grew pale.

Gerald gave an impatient exclamation.

"Don't be so artificial and stagey, mater! You seem to forget that we are living in the twentieth century—not in Queen Elizabeth's reign," he said, as he crossed the room to the door.

Martin was waiting beneath the ancient lamp which but dimly lighted the great hall, and beneath the yellow light his face was hard set and grim.

Gerald Graham had many faults, but harbouring malicious grudges was certainly not one of them.

He advanced towards Martin with outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Martin?" he said.

From the first he had called his protege by his Christian name.

"How do you feel for to-morrow night? I've staked my last fiver on you, my boy," he said, as cheerily and unconcernedly as if the home of his boyhood was not about to be sold over his head, and his financial outlook as dark as it could be.

"The young waster!" muttered Martin beneath his breath, ignoring the outstretched hand, which, to begin with, was hardly tactful.

Gerald Graham flushed, and his manner, from being amiable, became cold and curt.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, shortly.

"Is there a place where we can talk undisturbed for five minutes?" said Martin, replying to the question by asking another.

"Certainly." Gerald Graham led the way to his smoking room.

"Well?" he said, without asking Martin to sit down.

"I saw you this morning, I was in that hold-up at Trafalgar Square; I was able to see into your cab," said Martin, coming at once to the point.

A puzzled expression, as if he was trying to recall something, crept into Gerald Graham's eyes.

"Well?" he said, again, in a tone of amused toleration.

His voice seemed to act on Martin like a tinder applied to a trail of gunpowder. His eyes fairly blazed in his white face; he choked down the impulse to drive his fist into the cool, supercilious face before him, because, even through the rising tide of his anger, the thought of Daisy's nearness was with him.

But his voice trembled as he came close, and, looking the other man squarely between the eyes, said, in a tone that men so rarely use in talking to one other that it cuts deeply where there is even the faintest spark of goodness—and Gerald Graham was by no means a bad man, "Is that all you've got to say—*well*?" he said, unconsciously imitating the other's tone. "Why, man, instead of driving through the public streets with some other woman in your arms, you ought to be down on your knees thanking God for your wife."

Martin's voice quivered with emotion; if only the chance to love and serve Daisy had been his!

It was like a rusty file applied to an aching tooth when Gerald Graham threw back his sleek head



with a laugh that lasted fully thirty seconds.

When he recovered, it was to find Martin standing over him with doubled fists.

"If it weren't for your wife, I'd knock your head off!" he said, thickly.

"But, man alive, I haven't got a wife—not yet, at any rate!" said Gerald Graham, still struggling with the impulse to laugh. "That was little Dolly Dale you saw me with; she's in the show at the Hilarity," he said, easily. "When things are a bit more settled, I'm going to pop the question, seeing that you had all the luck in the other quarter," he finished, with a meaning glance.

"Why, what's up, Martin—not feeling groggy, are you?" he said, getting up and pouring out a whisky and soda from a cabinet.

Martin was standing with his hands dropped helplessly at his side, on his face the scared expression sometimes seen in nervous children.

"No, I'm all right. Tell me that again—that you haven't a wife?" he said, speaking in hurried, breathless jerks.

"Certainly, if you want to hear it over again. I haven't a wife, but that is due to the fact that the girl I wanted—and you know whom I mean, Daisy Harland—threw me over, saying that she preferred to marry you. I'm going to marry Dolly, if she'll have me, because she's a bright little thing, and a good sort at the bottom, just the kind of girl to be a good pal to a man so long as he did the straight thing by her."

Gerald Graham stopped to light another cigarette, and he looked long and curiously at his visitor, whom he had never seen so agitated since he had known him.

"Everything all right, now? Satisfied?" he asked, in quizzical tones.

"Where is Daisy, and who told you that she cared for me? Why, man, I'd give every hope I possess for confirmation of that," said Martin, hoarsely, and there was that in his voice and eyes that caused the other man, formed in a more delicate, transparent mould, to turn away, feeling, for a reason which he was powerless to define, a little ashamed.

Gerald Graham was not of the type from which the great lovers of the world are drawn; skimming the cream off the surface of life was quite enough for him. He loved Daisy Harland, and if she would have had him, he would have married her and made her quite a pleasant, indulgent husband.

But he knew, instinctively, who was the finer, better man, the most likely to make the life of any woman a perfect poem of happiness by the depth of his love and devotion; and, though he could never hope to emulate, he could, at least, admire, and this he did, in full measure.

Leaning over the table, he gripped Martin's hand, and there was no hint of laughter or sarcasm in his voice as he said, "Go in and win, my boy. Out of all the men I've ever known or met, if I had to choose Daisy Harland's husband I'd choose you, in

spite of the hardness of your fists," he finished, with a sly, reminiscent smile. "It was Daisy herself who admitted that you were the reason for breaking off our engagement, and as far as her whereabouts are concerned, well, I've only had one letter from her since she left Lynton, and that was when she sent back the ring I'd given her. I didn't want it, and told her so, but she insisted on returning it. Ah, here it is."

Martin did not glance at the letter itself, his eyes only pounced, with eagle-like swiftness, upon the address, neatly written in the top right-hand corner.

His face fell. It had been written from Penter's Place.

"I've been there. She's left, along with her mother," he said, sadly. "But I'll find her, if I have to search every street and alley for her," he went on, getting to his feet, as if in preparation for an immediate search of London's innumerable highways and byways.

"Better by far advertise in the personal columns of the newspapers—all women read 'em," said Gerald Graham, better up in feminine psychology than Martin.

"It's too late to get back to London to-night, and you don't want to crock yourself up with walking, with what's before you to-morrow. Won't you stay and pick a bone with us, and go up by the first train to-morrow?" said Gerald Graham, in a tone of warm friendliness.

In ten minutes, having apologised to Mrs. Graham

and her daughters for his lack of evening attire, Martin was seated at the dinner table, beside Ailsa, whose appetite for the meal was utterly destroyed.

Never had Martin been so arresting ; she felt his presence to her very finger-tips, and yet he said very little.

It was a difficult meal. Mrs. Graham seemed to have determined upon a policy of well-bred freezing, and only her son's cleverness at small talk kept the conversational ball even slowly rolling.

Martin felt the chill in the atmosphere, but it was absolutely powerless to hurt him ; within he was all warm and glowing, and so happy that he had the utmost difficulty in refraining from the impulse to do absurd, boyish things ; he wanted to stand on his head, turn Catherine wheels, shout at the top of his voice for joy—he felt as young as the spring, and as wildly happy as a lark on a blue summer morning.

He had entered into his man's kingdom of love ; somewhere in the world was Daisy, his woman, his mate, and he felt that no harshness meted out to him by others could ever again cause him pain.

With the knowledge of what was before him on the morrow, Martin did his best to sleep when he retired to bed, in one of the big, draughty guest-rooms in the east wing of the house.

But sleep was impossible ; the joybirds were singing too loud a song in his heart. It was almost dawn when he dropped into a light slumber, and it seemed that he had scarcely closed his eyes before



he was awakened by the smell of burning, and the sound of crackling flames.

Just as he finished flinging on a few clothes, he heard the sound of a shout at the end of the long corridor which led to his room, and the next moment Gerald Graham, breathless, dashed into his room.

"The house is afire, Martin! There's no hope of saving it, for the old place will burn like firewood. It seems to have started in the cellars. Come and help to get out what we can."

Martin's brain was instantly alert; he dashed after his former employer, and very quickly saw that he had already lost his head.

"Go and collect a dozen young men, and alarm the fire station. I'll set to and do what I can while you are gone," he said, taking the lead almost instinctively.

With a feeling of intense gratitude, Gerald Graham rushed off to obey orders.

Martin found the women already gathered in the grounds, huddled together in a frightened, shivering mass.

Ailsa, whom one would have thought quite capable of meeting an emergency, suddenly subsided into hysterics. Only Mrs. Graham, who was, curiously enough, attired just as she had been the night before—in her favourite dinner gown of silk brocade, with Mechlin lace at neck and wrists—only she was calm, and she looked like one of the figures in a mediaeval canvas come to life as she stood watching the flames licking the ancient woodwork of Weatherly Towers with a vague smile on her deathly white face.

The sentence that Martin overheard, spoken in a low, tense voice, made him look sharply at her, and caused him, as the result of that look, to make her his first care.

“ My home is saved—saved—no alien can tread its rooms, or lodge within its walls. Fire is a great foe, but a greater friend.”

A hazy suspicion of the truth darted into Martin's brain, but the whole truth was never known, so cleverly had Mrs. Graham concealed her tracks.

Not all Julia Milburn's cleverness could revive a dead passion, and she would not advance a penny of her large fortune to save the home for which Mrs. Graham had schemed and fought, and even committed offences punishable by law.

By a superhuman effort, she had kept the holders of the mortgage from foreclosing for six months, but none of her schemes for saving it had fructified, and then came the determination to destroy rather than yield.

The absence of servants made it quite easy for her to make her preparations unobserved, and as the property was well insured, probably the owners were not so inconsolable as they might have been.

Martin worked like half a dozen men during the fiercest hours of the fire, and a journalist, whose home happened to be in the vicinity, made the most of his splendid coup by describing, in moving language, how Martin Eversley, the young pugilist-author, who happened to be staying in the house, risked his life in order to save a little Pekinese, the

pet of Miss Ailsa Graham, which had been left in her bedroom.

The newspapers were full of the fire at Weatherly Towers, and much sympathy was expressed for the Graham family, but especially for Gerald Graham, for the news of the revoking of his great-uncle's will had been public property.

"Honestly, I can't pretend to be sorry that the old barn's gone up in smoke," the object of journalistic sympathy told Martin, a couple of hours before the match. "It had a bad influence on the mater, who used to forget that some consideration was due to the living, as well as the dead. The girls didn't have half a chance, for she'd never take them about," he went on, and there was a note of deep satisfaction in Gerald Graham's voice as he finished. "I'm going to take the mater and the girls across to France for a bit, and when we come back, we'll try for a jolly little flat in Kensington, or somewhere lively. I start my job in a month's time, and with one thing and another, we ought to be good for a couple of thousand a year between us. I say, Martin," he added, anxiously, "I've got all I could scrape together on you to-night. Be a good chap and pull it off, won't you?"

Martin's reply was hardly scholastic, but it was certainly forceful as he said, brimming over with the confidence which, a few hours later, won him a triumphant victory, "You just bet I will, Mr. Graham!"

## CHAPTER XXXI

**I**T was very rarely that Daisy permitted herself the luxury of a newspaper to read in the train on her way to school ; she generally waited until she got there, when one was passed round during the morning recess.

But Martin's name had been prominent on placards and hoardings and in every newspaper for days past, and the papers which gave their news in picture form promised to devote a special section to the fight.

He had won. "Of course he would win," Daisy told herself, with the blind, unquestioning faith which most women possess, being usually quite ignorant, and so the news did not thrill her at all.

But she gloried in the adjectives which were applied to him, personally.

"Clean," "a sportsman through and through," "a thousand pities that the ring has to lose so splendid a fighter," and so on.

There was not one discordant note.

The only paragraphs that had brought tears to Daisy's eyes, and a wild, unnameable ache to her heart were those in the newspapers of the previous day, which had described him risking his life for the sake of Ailsa Graham's dog.



"He'll be able to marry her now," was Daisy's first thought, as her mind reverted to the large sum of money which Martin had won by his victory of the night before.

A stab of jealousy pierced her heart, as her imagination ran riot, and drew for her a mental picture of Martin as he probably was, at that moment.

Ailsa would be with him, congratulating and sympathising all in a breath; she did not visualise Martin as having been badly hurt, because the newspapers said that he had had a "walk-over."

"She is with him, and they will be kissing each other, and arranging for their wedding! Oh, I wish I could either die or forget."

But that is what Love will not let its victims do; rarely do those who suffer its dark side die, and still more rarely do they forget.

Daisy's way lay past a large book store; she was already late for school, but a demon of recklessness entered into her being when she saw a whole window devoted to a show of Martin's book which, with characteristic simplicity, he had called "My Own Story." Assistants had worked overtime to dress the window directly the result of the match was made known. The enterprising publisher had hit upon the happy idea of getting Martin to have two photographs taken, one at his writing table and the other in his training clothes; altogether, the term "pugilist-author," which was to stick to Martin throughout a great part of his literary career, seemed most apt.

A mist of tears blinded Daisy as, hardly knowing what she did, she stumbled into the shop and asked for a copy of the book.

"You are the first customer this morning, Miss, and it's a good omen that it's young Eversley's book you want. I've read it myself. My, but it's worth the money, that book! A man's book, every word of it," said the salesman, enthusiastically, as he took Daisy's three half-crowns and tied a string around the book.

Directly she got outside Daisy tore off the paper and string, and opened her precious new possession. Then a sob caught her throat, and into her puzzled eyes there crept the ghost of a smile as she read the inscription on the first page.

"Dedicated to one I loved and lost, D.H.," she read, with an ever deepening sense of bewilderment.

A church clock chimed the half-hour; her class would be waiting, but she did not care; it was doubtful if she even remembered her vocation at that moment.

"I wonder if he received the letter which I sent to him at the hospital?" Daisy unwittingly stumbled upon the right explanation, but of course she was unaware of the fact. It would certainly never occur to her that anybody could be so utterly lost to all sense of decency as to burn another person's letter.

It was nearly ten o'clock when she eventually reached school, but her flushed face and bright eyes, coupled with her slightly strained manner, caused

the Headmistress, whose hobby was St. John's Ambulance work, to thrust a thermometer beneath Daisy's unwilling tongue.

"H'm! You've got a headache, of course?" she queried, looking very kind but capable, as she spoke.

As it seemed as if a million little hammers were knocking at Daisy's head, she was able truthfully to answer "Yes."

"I thought so. Better go home and stop there for a couple of days. Slight touch of 'flu, I should think. No, don't argue, but go at once, and call in at the doctor's on your way;" and ordering another teacher to take over her class, Daisy was sent home almost as if she had been a pupil instead of a teacher.

But Daisy did not go home. Spring was in the air, Hampstead Heath was only a twopenny tram ride away, and she was consumed with an eager, passionate longing to read the book which was hers—hers, and not Ailsa Graham's, as it surely should have been.

It was a poor, petty enough triumph over the girl who would be the biggest influence in Martin's future, and it brought no lasting sense of satisfaction.

She wanted Martin. To the uttermost corner of her loving, honest little heart she wanted him. He set her pulses quivering, dancing, daring, dreaming, and even if she could, she would not call back that which had been so sweet to give.

Under the shade of a linden tree just trembling



into leaf, Daisy opened Martin's book, and she sat with her eyes rivetted to its pages, absolutely unconscious of the passing of time, until she finished the last page.

It was a wonderful book ; it was a man's book for men, as the shopkeeper had said, but a man's book is always a woman's book, too, and that was why it would be an overwhelming success ; it is the books written for women that seldom attract men, but never does the reverse apply.

Daisy took the tram to Camden Town, meaning to go straight home, but, as events turned out, it was a kindly fate that caused her to reach the tram terminus just as the workers in a big factory had formed a queue which looked far too formidable for Daisy to care about making another member of the chain.

Having decided to walk, it was almost a matter of habit to purchase a newspaper from the little boy who passed, shouting the latest news. Generally, of late, a newspaper contained something that her eager hands could cull—a portrait, a paragraph, sometimes a whole article written by Martin himself.

There was a feast to-day for the excited girl—a portrait, and an account of his thought-processes in the ring, written by himself and signed with a facsimile of his own handwriting.

But there was something more, besides ; and when Daisy read the announcement of a big West End Cinema to the effect that they were showing the pictures of the big fight, exactly as it had taken



place the previous night, she ran all the way to the tube and could scarcely conceal her impatience at the necessary halts between the stations.

She took a seat in the most expensive part of the house so as to get the best possible view, and when the orchestra started to play "Men of Harlech," her emotions almost overcame her, and she dug her nails into the upholstery of her seat so as to prevent herself from shouting aloud all the pride that was in her heart.

## CHAPTER XXXII

“**T**HANKS, but I feel quite fit; it's never the day after that one feels a gruelling in the ring—it's generally on the third day or so.”

Martin Eversley was speaking, and, with the exception of a big bruise on his forehead, and a cut on his chin—which, after being skilfully treated, looked as if it might be a shaving mishap—his handsome face was quite uninjured. Nearly all his punishment had been received on places far more vital than his face, and it was not quite true to say that he felt absolutely fit.

“But I feel fit enough to find my little girl, if she is to be found at all in this wilderness of a city,” he told himself, grimly, as he carefully adjusted a velour hat so as to hid the disfiguring bruise, and then turned to face his trainer with a laugh.

“I'm sorry, too, that it's good-bye, Joe, but, if ever I do alter my mind, I promise that no other trainer shall come within fifty miles of knocking me into shape,” and with a final handclasp, accompanied by a generous acknowledgment of his services, Martin Eversley dissolved the last link which bound him to a life that he was determined to put behind him.

It was impossible for him to rest, impossible for him to enjoy the fruits of his efforts while Daisy Harland lived in the same city, unmarried because she loved him, and probably thinking that all his own protestations of love had been just so much hot air, since he had not sought her out, and claimed her for his own.

His first visit was to his publishers. They received him with beaming smiles and chuckles of satisfaction.

"The second edition is exhausted, the third is entirely booked, and the fourth is making headway. It was simply a splendid move, to publish yesterday. By the way, how do you feel? Oh, but you must come down and see our staff of packers at work on your stuff," the managing director said, without waiting for anything so trivial as a reply to his question regarding Martin's condition.

But a girl whose back reminded him faintly of Daisy passed by the window, and, without a word of apology to the astonished publisher, Martin rushed out of the office without another word.

He overtook the girl, but it was not Daisy, and he walked on mechanically, not caring whither he went, choosing always the streets which contained the greater number of women.

Eventually, he found himself in Regent Street, and at the far end a queue of people outside a cinema house barred his way. The traffic in the roadway was too dense to allow him to walk round

the crowd, so, because it was the easier way, he moved with it.

Suddenly, his own name arrested his ear ; then he understood.

A big poster, depicting himself in fighting attire, surrounded by photo prints of the match, was just inside the doorway, and all these people were paying their money and crowding and jostling each other to see him.

It would be idle to deny that a sense of exultation filled Martin's heart—only a cynically superior person is indifferent to the homage of his fellows—and Martin Eversley was almost boyishly youthful in some respects.

He pushed his way in with the others, and bought a ticket for the best part of the house—he, too, wanted to see himself as others saw him, with the least difficulty—and a frizzy-haired girl in a wedgewood blue frock escorted him to a seat which was only four rows removed from the girl whose memory was enough to set his pulses leaping and thrilling with the oldest emotion known to mankind.

The crowded audience waited more or less impatiently while a couple of trivial screen stories were acted, and a sound like a gigantic sigh passed through the house when at length patience was rewarded and a close-up of Martin, and then of his opponent, appeared on the screen.

The wild storm of clapping and stamping, together with a cheer from some boys who had



stolen an afternoon from work to come, thrilled through the young ex-pugilist as he sat quietly in the darkness, and he found that he was only able to nod in reply to an observation made by the man at his side.

"Fine chap, ain't he?" said the picture-goer, who would have been half crazy with excitement if he had known the identity of his neighbour.

A hush fell over the house as the fight commenced, and the people started to follow the eagle-swift movements of the combatants, and the most interested of them all was the man who was seeing himself for the first and last time.

The newspapers had described the fight as "disappointingly brief," but it is extremely doubtful if the gentlemen who made these peevish criticisms from the stalls would have cared to have endured such a ceaseless rain of blows for longer than ten minutes, which was the length of the fight's duration.

To Daisy, watching the screen with dry mouth, aching eyes, and a heart which seemed to miss a beat every time that a blow went home, it seemed as if a whole eternity were being lived through while Martin's opponent, whom, with true feminine lack of logic, she fiercely hated, punched and pummelled and made great red weals on his white skin.

It was the blow that cut the skin above Martin's left eye, causing the blood to flow, that proved too much for Daisy's endurance.

It was the blow that led to her own ultimate happiness, for, except for the scene that followed, she and Martin might have passed out of the building almost touching shoulders, without seeing each other.

"Oh, don't—don't!"

It was a cry which had nothing of hysteria in its notes; there was a certain poignant, heart-breaking pathos in the involuntary appeal for mercy.

"It's all right, Miss. He ain't hurt. Why, it's only a scratch," said the man in the seat next to Daisy, just as much absorbed as she, yet putting out a hand to steady her as she seemed to be falling across him.

He put out the other hand when he divined what had happened.

"Fainted, she has," he told the woman beside him, who immediately got up and made way for him to pass into the gangway, as he was carrying the slight little form in his arms.

He had only proceeded a step or two when his path was blocked by a tall, broad figure which bore down upon him like a miniature hurricane, holding out arms which were twitching and almost trembling with the fierce tumult of emotion that had been aroused by Daisy Harland's cry.

For, sitting only a few rows away, his ears had caught the sound of the words as well as the little uncontrolled nervous cry which had accompanied them, and, hearing, he recognised the voice which was the dearest in the world to him.

Heedless of his neighbours' black looks and audible protests as he pushed past them just when the fight was getting interesting, Martin reached the gangway in less than five seconds and there he stood, holding out his arms as if Daisy belonged to him and he had the right to her.

"Get out of the way, can't yer, unless the girl's yourn! She's fainted," said the man, eyeing Martin angrily in the semi-darkness.

"She—she's a friend of mine. Give her to me, I tell you," and, without wasting more words, Martin forced open the hands which held Daisy and the next moment she was safely in his arms, her little white face against his breast, and the feel of her, the wonder of it all sent a wild joy thrilling through his heart even while his head urged him to seek the open air with his precious burden, as quickly as possible.

But he was not to get his wish so easily.

The scene had distracted the attention of the audience, and a wave of unrest, surging through the house, caused the manager, who was present, to give the order for lights to be turned up and the performance stopped.

Martin was half-way down the gangway when the house was suddenly illuminated, and he blinked his eyes angrily at the unexpected glare.

Every eye in the building was strained in an endeavour to see what was happening.

Suddenly there was a roar of acclamation and a general stampede of the audience.

Martin had been recognised !

" It's Eversley himself ! Good old Mart ! Who'd have thought it ? Look, there's the bruise and cut. It's him, all right. How are you, old pal ? "

Excited admirers climbed over the backs of chairs, and impatiently jostled each other in order to crowd round the idol of the moment.

Martin's picture was still on the screen, where the operator, obeying orders, had left it, until a resumption of the film should be possible.

He had left his hat beneath his seat in his hurry, and, with the bruises on his face for proof, and the likeness before them, there was no possibility of Martin's being the " double " of the great fighting champion.

" Let me get out, will you ? Haven't you sense enough to see that this lady is not well ? "

Martin barked out his words between effective shoulder movements, which soon cleared his path of the admirers whom he wished at the other end of the earth, since they were causing him to delay attending to Daisy.

The manager, hurrying round from the opposite side of the hall, stood in Martin's path.

" If you will follow me, Mr. Eversley, I will take you to my office. There is a couch in the room," he said, in a calm and sensible manner which immediately won Martin's heart.

He cleared a path through the crowd, and on his way gave orders to recommence the showing of the film.



Some of the audience returned to their seats, but the greater part left, to hang about outside on the chance of getting another glimpse of their idol.

"You are all right, honey girl? It was only a faint, wasn't it?"

Martin, tortured by the thought that Daisy might be seriously ill, asked her the same question over and over again in the little room where he had been bidden to carry her.

"Martin, are you real, or is it a dream? Let me feel you, dear," and Martin's eager, impetuous soul thrilled at the touch of the little white fingers on his eyes, his hair, his lips.

"It's no dream, darling, but if it is, pray God that it lasts the rest of my life," said Martin, hoarsely, gathering the small, child-like form into his arms, and pressing it so tightly that Daisy might have cried out, had not her joy been too great to admit of pain.

Then, sitting side by side on the horsehair sofa in the cinema manager's office, they told each other things which cleared their mutual sky of misunderstandings and doubts; and Daisy's essentially feminine heart gave a great leap of joy when she heard from Martin's own lips his true feelings towards Ailsa Graham.

"And so, you see, I felt bound to do my best for her, and I am glad now that I stuck to her, for she is a totally different woman to-day. There is just a chance that romance may come again

into her life," said Daisy, concluding the story of her mother's extraordinary claim while he lay sick in hospital, recovering from the effects of his accident.

Martin's brows came together during the recital, and he asked, abruptly, "Did she have any proof beyond her own word that you were her daughter? It's a most extraordinary thing, and cool cheek into the bargain, to foist a child upon a perfect stranger, and then to lay claim to it when it has grown up."

"Oh, she did her best to persuade me not to come to London. She says her reason for not claiming me was because her second husband, who refused to keep another man's child, was such a brute to her, and her mother, old Granny Horrex—it was she who placed me on Miss Harland's doorstep—told her such wonderful stories about the way I was being brought up that she thought she would be a criminal to take me away from so splendid a home. It would never have come out but for poor old Granny, who told the whole story to Doctor Browne when she was on her deathbed. She was always wonderfully fond of me, and used to insist on having one of my photographs every time one was taken. Of course, it was quite natural, as I was her grandchild," concluded Daisy, with a happy little laugh which showed that it was neither her mother nor the departed Granny Horrex who was uppermost in her mind just then.

"Yes, quite natural," agreed Martin, more than content to let everything and everybody, except Daisy, slip into the background.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

THEY had moved away from the city, and were now in the country. The house was a large, comfortable one, with a garden and a few acres of land. Daisy was very happy, and Martin was very content. They had been married for some time, and their life was very happy. They had no children, but they were very fond of each other. They had been married for some time, and their life was very happy. They had no children, but they were very fond of each other. They had been married for some time, and their life was very happy. They had no children, but they were very fond of each other.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

**T**O get away from the enthusiastic mob of cinema patrons had been a little work of art on Martin Eversley's part.

He had signed autograph albums and picture postcard photographs of himself until his arm ached ; his mouth felt as if it would never again be normal through being stretched so often across his jaws in what he called "an idiotic grin!" in reply to newspaper camera men who urged him to smile.

Daisy had glowed with pride and pleasure throughout it all, and once or twice a doubt had crept into her mind as to whether Martin was doing right in abandoning the very proud position that he had won just at the height of his fame.

It was past five o'clock when the taxi drew up outside the Camden Town lodgings where Daisy and her mother lived.

"It isn't so nice as Rose Cottage, of course, but at any rate, it is clean and wholesome, and a hundred per cent better than our first lodging," said Daisy, as she led the way up the staircase covered with oilcloth, and smelling strongly of carbolic soap and water, to the first floor, where she and Lizzie Carson occupied three rooms.



"Mother, I've brought somebody to see you," cried Daisy, in a clear, ringing, happy voice which, under other circumstances, would have brought a look of pleasure to the eyes of the woman who, many a time since she had known her, had wished passionately that Daisy had indeed been her own daughter.

But, as Daisy pushed open the door, and drew Martin into the room, a look of fear and furtive, undeniable horror, darted into the eyes of the woman who had often cursed the gold which had tempted her to so cruelly wrong a little child.

Martin saw the look, and it caused him immediate uneasiness. He had penetrated too deeply into the haunts of men not to know that such looks had history behind them.

Lizzie Carson was not alone in the room; she had more visitors than she wanted that afternoon.

Ben Turner, in his Sunday clothes, looking very awkward, sat on the extreme edge of a chair, with his child held firmly between his knees, as if he had some special reason for keeping her out of mischief.

"Good afternoon, Miss," said the big, burly man, rising to his feet, and holding out his hand to Daisy.

He kept it longer than he need, in order to shake it once again, at the conclusion of a sheepish little confession.

"I s'pose I'll 'ave to get out of calling you 'Miss,' and take to 'Daisy,' seein' that me an'

yer ma 'as fixed up to be wed, an' I want to tell yer, Miss—Daisy, I mean,—that Ben Turner's 'ome is your 'ome just as long as you choose," and Daisy felt herself struggling with an irresistible desire to laugh and cry at the same time as she replied, " You couple of dears, I'm so glad ! I saw this coming, you know. But I won't have to inflict myself upon you for very long, Mr. Turner, because you see, I mean to follow your excellent example," and Daisy darted a laughing glance at Martin, whom she had not yet had time to introduce.

Ben Turner took his cue from the remark in characteristic fashion.

" Put it there, lad," he said, extending his rough, grimy hand, which no amount of washing could ever get clean.

" You'll be welcome to do all your courting in my parlour," he added, genially.

The words did not jar on Daisy ; she had lived long enough with Ben Turner's kind to know how such words were meant.

But her own and Martin's attention was drawn towards a short, sturdily built young woman, who sat quietly near the window, not saying a word.

She was the exact counterpart of Lizzie Carson, as well she might have been, since she was her own flesh and blood.

Betty generally came to see her mother in the afternoons, and took her departure well before five-thirty, which was Daisy's hour for returning from afternoon school.

"This is Betty, my niece," explained Lizzie Carson, looking very red and uncomfortable as she performed the introduction.

It was the merest accident which gave Lizzie Carson the lie, one of those trifles which so often decide great issues.

The kettle was boiling for tea on an open fire-place, and Lizzie Carson's skirt almost caught in the spout as she turned round with sudden violence in order to avoid looking at Daisy.

"Look out, mother," warned Betty, jumping up and dragging the kettle off the fire as she spoke.

Martin's ears pricked up at the words.

Coupled with the terror in the woman's eyes, the fact that, though in a much coarser mould, the girl looked neither older nor younger than Daisy, caused him to look up suspiciously when the word "mother" fell from Betty's lips.

"Do you usually call your aunt 'mother'?" he said, addressing the embarrassed girl, but also looking keenly at the misery-wracked face of her parent.

Betty hung her head, not knowing what to reply, but Lizzie Carson jumped up, and, standing by the table, with tears streaming down her face, she exclaimed, "I don't care if I do a ten-year 'stretch' for it, I'm going to tell the truth now. I've never had no peace ever since that girl, who's been a blessed little angel to me," the streaming eyes were turned upon Daisy, "not ever since I've known her, and done that Mrs. Milburn's

dirty work for her, 'ave I 'ad a minute's peace," she sobbed, brokenly.

Martin started at the sound of Julia Milburn's name, and his mouth grew hard. Daisy was dumb with astonishment.

"You'd better pull yourself together, Mrs. Carson, and make a clean breast of things," said Martin, in a voice which, though not unkind, was certainly not in the least sentimental.

It did not escape his notice that Ben Turner got up from his seat and ranged himself beside Lizzie.

"Get it off yer chest, gel, whatever it is—'twon't make no difference ter me—remember that," he said, placing a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

As she sobbed out the whole miserable, sordid, mean story, Martin Eversley's eyes grew dark with alternate anger and contempt.

"So, for five hundred pounds, you robbed a child of her birthright, and left her to the mercy of a complete stranger, and not content with that, you conspire with another woman as bad as yourself to rob her of love, the home that a gracious and kindly woman had given her, and all that she has been used to. In return, she gives you all that she has to give, bless her, when ten years penal servitude would be nearer the mark for such a disgrace to womanhood as yourself."

"I know—I know," sobbed the thoroughly broken woman, who raised herself the least bit in Martin's estimation when she made no plea for mercy.



"I'll go to the station now with you if you like," she said, reaching for her hat and coat.

"There's no need for that at present," replied Martin, curtly. "The fellow who stole Miss Harland's inheritance from her mother is dead, you say. You are sure of that?" he asked, with a keen glance at Lizzie's red, tear-blotched face.

"Positive certain. His grave's in Wykfield churchyard," was her reply.

"There was a letter addressed to a firm of solicitors in Southampton Row which he posted before Miss Harland's mother died. You saw him post that letter?" questioned Martin, with relentless persistence.

"Yes," was the miserable, low-spoken reply.

"Then it's our job to find out which firm of solicitors received that letter. When we've done that, we shall doubtless solve the mystery of your parentage," he finished, turning to Daisy, who was sitting silently by the window, holding Lily Turner on her lap, too utterly bewildered at the turn which events had taken to share the conversation.

They commenced to search the following morning, and found that that part of Lizzie Carson's story was perfectly true.

They were successful at the third firm which they tried, and it was the senior partner, an old man, who remembered Daisy's mother.

"You are very like her, Miss Leslie; she was just about your age when I first knew her," he said, peering closely at Daisy through his glasses.

"It would be in keeping with the rest of your romance to discover yourself the daughter of an earl or at least a baronet," he said, with a gleam of humour in his eyes. "Facts, however, are that your mother was Marguerite Wooland, the only child of a very strait-laced, rather narrow-minded clergyman, who had brought her up to regard the stage and everything pertaining to it with horror ; hence, as often as she could, the young girl secretly visited the theatre with some friends who were not known to her parents.

"She met and fell in love with Oscar Leslie, a young man of good family but no prospects who was trying to make his way on the stage.

"There was a secret wedding, and eventually the young husband was compelled to take an engagement in Australia, in order to earn a living.

"The entire company was drowned in a squall, and when the news reached your poor mother, she was compelled to tell that which could no longer be kept a secret, for you were coming in a few months' time.

"When her father learned the truth, he turned her out of doors, and her mother was powerless to soften him. She saw her only child turned into the streets, but she managed to give your mother every piece of jewellery she possessed, including some rare gems that were really heirlooms.

"In the letter which we received, the whole story is told, up to the time of your birth. Your mother's marriage certificate is here, but I conclude that

your own birth certificate was in the packet of gems which the man to whom she entrusted them stole.

"Mrs. Wooland has been dead a matter of five years now; she never got over her daughter's loss, and I think that she was glad to go, but it would have brought a great deal of happiness into her life if she could have brought you up, my dear. She lived on an annuity, and there was nothing much to leave when she died," the old lawyer concluded, as if he had kept the most important part of his story until the finish.

"Give me the letters, give me everything that my mother ever wrote. That is all I want," said Daisy, with tear-filled eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Harland, looking ten years younger than her age, and as healthy as the young couple who had come to Egypt for their honeymoon, sat waiting for them in the private sitting room of their hotel, her eyes gleaming brightly with happy tears.

Daisy and Martin had only arrived that morning, but they had insisted upon going out before lunch to explore the native bazaars.

Miss Harland did not feel like accompanying them. She wanted to sit and think over all that she had heard.

"I am glad that you decided to take no action against that poor woman, especially as the man insisted on marrying her in spite of everything.

But," and Miss Harland's face grew hard and her voice cold as she added, "it would have served Mrs. Milburn right to have been exposed; she had not the other poor creature's excuse."

"I gave her a fright that will last her all her life," said Martin, with a twist of his mouth that could hardly be termed a smile.

They wanted her, her children, as the loving, lovable spinster called them. They were going to take her back with them to England and she was to live near, so that they could look after her and see her every day.

Miss Harland's soul sang within her as the door opened to admit her eager, excited "children."

They filled her hands with gifts, and made of her the fuss that her heart loved, and her lips decried.

"We've been married three weeks to-day, Auntie," cried the radiant little bride, and as the woman who had hushed her infant cries looked tenderly into the flower-like young face, she found herself thinking a thought that had become a conviction long years ago, which was, that until a woman loved, she slept; that one half, the finest half of life, is hidden from the human being who has not loved with passion.

THE END.







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